

Addressing COVID-19 in Africa: Challenges and Leadership in a Context of Global Economic Transformation



Special CGET Report

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Institute for New Economic Thinking

About INET

We are economists who challenge conventional wisdom and advance ideas to better serve society. Founded in the wake of the financial crisis in 2009, the Institute for New Economic Thinking (INET) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization devoted to developing and sharing the ideas that can repair our broken economy and create a more equal, prosperous, and just society. To meet current and future challenges, we conduct and commission research, convene forums for exchanging ideas, develop curricula, and nurture a global community of young scholars.

Our approach is guided by a set of key principles:

- Economists and their ideas must be independent from powerful interests. Otherwise, economics is beholden to those at the very top and fails to serve all of society.
- Complexity and uncertainty are inherent in economic and financial systems. We must question theories based upon the flawed assumption that humans always behave rationally and predictably, and that markets always trend towards equilibrium.
- Inequality and distribution matter as much to the economy as growth and productivity.
- Heterodox models that pose alternatives to the neoclassical orthodoxy are essential to understanding the economy and promoting a vibrant intellectual pluralism.
- History matters. We must learn the lessons of past mistakes, and also draw on roads not taken historically to map a more equal and prosperous future.
- Diversity of race, gender, class, and other forms of identity enrich economic thought.
- An outdated economic structure is endangering our planet—but new approaches could save it. To uncover solutions, economists must first incorporate analyses of climate change, population growth, and stressed resources into their research.

- Multidisciplinary learning. A discipline in isolation develops harmful blind spots. We collaborate with scholars in other social sciences, the humanities, and the natural sciences to better understand our world.

We work with the economics community to:

- Produce and fund innovative research.
- Develop curricula and educational resources for students.
- Support INET's Young Scholars Initiative, a global network that is nurturing the next generation of new economic thinkers.
- Host conferences where leading and emerging economists, students, and other scholars exchange and develop new research and ideas.

We work with influencers and policymakers to:

- Amplify the work of our staff economists and grantees, ensuring that their findings and ideas can have real-world impact.
- Apply new economic thinking to policy questions, as with our Commission on Global Economic Transformation.
- Demystify economics for the engaged public through our blog and video content, social media channels, and events.

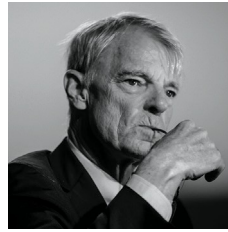


About CGET

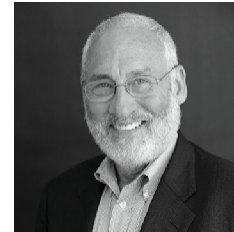
Initiated by the Institute for New Economic Thinking, the Commission on Global Economic Transformation (CGET) aims to clearly enumerate and articulate the most critical problems in the global economy. Political and economic populism recently swept the developed world. Meanwhile, developing countries are struggling to search for paths to prosperity, and people around the world are coping with the challenges posed by widening inequality, technological disruption, and climate change. These are compounded by the ineffectiveness of current policy tools, raising questions about the role of the state, civil society, along with national and international governance frameworks.

CGET will harness the energy already evident in the academic and public spheres to chart alternative reforms that will support a more sustainable, prosperous course for the world economy. CGET will also build a knowledge bank of high-quality research that will inform policymakers with evidence-based recommendations. Culminating in a final report, CGET will bring research findings and concrete guidance to bear on policy challenges—creating a bridge between meaningful research and leadership that will positively influence the transformation of the global economy.

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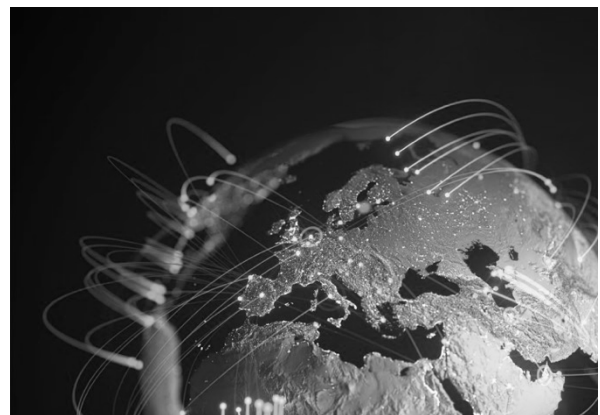
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"The Commission for Global Economic Transformation was created by INET in late 2015 to bring together a group of stellar economists who were acutely aware of a myriad of profound challenges on the horizon that

conventional economic analysis was not seemingly capable to address. Since its inception, 21 economists from around the world have been exploring what to do in response to disruptions caused by financialization, global warming, distressed migration, technological disruption, and a form of globalization that has impaired the integrity and functioning of the nation state."

—Rob Johnson, President of INET



Foreword by Rohinton Medhora, President of the Center for International Governance Innovation and CGET Commissioner

When dealing with ambiguous terms, David S. Landes states at the start of his landmark study of the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe *The Unbound Prometheus*, the first duty of a writer is definition. So it must be with economic transformation.



Transformation seldom just happens. The globalization of the past four decades has created unprecedented levels of wealth and poverty alleviation, and fostered – and been nourished by – dramatic technological advances. It has also been unbalanced – high in enabling capital mobility and the spread of digitally-enabled technologies, appreciable but slower in the trade of goods and many services, and slowest in the movement of people and the creation of institutions and processes to manage change. The consequences have been major, complex, and numerous. While cause and effect and relative weights of each component are impossible to sort out, the mix is a daunting one indeed.

Epitomized by the financial crisis of 2007 and events leading up to and after it, the bundle of related issues includes continued financial sector fragility, slow or stagnant growth in many parts of the world including the advanced economies, worsening income and wealth inequality (especially within countries), xenophobia, inadequate public and private responses to crisis and to social and political fracture, and disruptions to work particularly from new technologies. Climate change and environmental degradation are an integral part of this canvass, as are changing geopolitics and the contested rise of China. And in November 2019, along came the first known case of COVID-19.

The pandemic hasn't raised new issues as much as it has [added octane](#) to existing ones. It has implications for global cooperation, particularly with respect to innovation and intellectual property; faith in public action and in science; the civil liberties-security-privacy trade-off; social cohesion; U.S.-China relations with each other and with the rest of the world; far-flung supply chains and indeed on globalization itself.

Initiated in October 2017 under the stewardship of Nobel economics laureates Michael Spence and Joseph Stiglitz, the [Commission on Global Economic Transformation](#) is examining these trends with a view to proposing ways forward to maximize the benefits of transformation and mitigate its drawbacks. While much of our work is thematic – on digital technologies; the financial sector; climate change and energy; Globalization and the State – Africa forms a critical crosscut, for it is here that the issues we examine play out forcefully and in a distinct economic, social and political context. It is also in Africa, arguably, that the scope for

transformation remains largest.

Amidst a wave of democratization and openness (now under threat even regression), late demographic transition, fragile but strengthening States and markets, and the continued advance of regionalization, scenarios and options abound. Many are pessimistic, especially as robotics and machine learning techniques automate the lower end of the value chain where late industrializers typically operate, thus eliminating employment growth. But a youthful population, rich minerals and still extensive potential for land use, improved governance and the potential for leapfrogging and next-generation investments surely provide ample room for optimism too.

At the time of writing, South Africa's Afrigen Biologics has just announced the autonomous [development](#) of an mRNA vaccine for COVID-19 using publicly available data from Moderna. This while traditional "[last mile](#)" challenges of infrastructure and logistics continue to bedevil manufacturing and distribution on the continent. We may be no closer to a definition of economic transformation to suit Landes's challenge, but we know it when we see it. Managing change and contradiction is timeless and defies geographic boundaries. The case of Africa, as described in this fascinating set of conversations with eminent Africans thoughtfully curated by Camilla Toulmin and Folashade Soulé, is special but not unique.

This special report presents 25 interviews from the "COVID-19 and Africa series" which forms part of INET's Commission on Global Economic Transformation (CGET). The series is comprised of conversations with African and Africa-based economists and development experts, civil society leaders, private sector and regional organisations' leaders about their perspectives on economic transformation, development models and how the COVID situation could re-shape the options and pathways for Africa's development.

Conducted between May 2020 and March 2022, these interviews offer personal insights into how the pandemic was addressed by African leaders, the challenges they encountered, the diverse impacts on African societies and economies, and the endogenous solutions they have come up with.

Addressing COVID-19 Related Challenges: African Economists Get Involved

Benno Ndulu, University of Dar-es-Salaam:
“The pandemic has laid bare the pivotal roles of both the informal sector and SMEs”.
June 2020.

An interview with late Professor Benno Ndulu, the former Governor of the Bank of Tanzania (2008-2018), and Professor of



development economics at the University of Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania). Prof Ndulu was also a member of South African President Ramaphosa’s Economic Advisory Council. He worked as a Lead Economist with the Macroeconomic Division of the World Bank for Eastern Africa, and was best known for his involvement in setting up and developing one of the most effective research and training networks in Africa, the African Economic Research Consortium ([AERC](#)).

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered in Africa, just as in many parts of the world, both a health and an economic crisis. Although the continent seems - for now - less affected than others by infection and high death rates, the economic impact is much harder. Growth in sub-Saharan Africa has already significantly been affected, in part due to lockdown measures, but also to a large cut in global demand. The World Bank is forecasting a fall from 2.4% growth in 2019 to -5.1% in 2020, causing the first recession over the past 25 years. From your standpoint, how do you assess the economic and social impact the pandemic is having on African economies and livelihoods?

There are actually three dimensions to the impact of Covid-19 and there is quite a significant diversity across Africa, partly because of the type of responses to the pandemic which [varies significantly across countries](#). Firstly, there are countries that have immediately intervened with lockdowns. Generally, these countries have enough

resources to provide a safety-net type of intervention, but there are also other countries which have imposed lockdowns without adequate safety nets. They have used the power of the state to enforce such lockdowns without taking measures to really take care of populations that can’t go out and make an income. Remember, a significant proportion of the African population depends on day-to-day income in order to survive. So even among those who have enforced lockdowns, there is this big difference in access to safety-nets, and the impact will clearly be different too. There is another category of countries that have decided on going ‘light’ on social distancing: they have simply put certain health measures of personal hygiene and social distancing in place, not meeting in large crowds and closing schools and universities. I’m talking about countries like my own Tanzania, Ethiopia, Burundi. A good number of these are facing almost immediate elections and so they can’t afford to do much by shutting down their economies. I think a big part of this differentiation is the balance between lives and livelihoods. Those who can afford to implement safety nets are able to work with both, but those who are not able and who are also facing political pressure in terms of elections tended not to go that route. This is what I call adopting a Swedish model without the welfare system and without the capacity of the health system to deal with both testing and contact tracing and deal with care and handling emergencies. I think the depth of the economic difficulty coming out of the immediate response will very much depend on these categories. The difference between those that went through lockdowns and those that didn’t is a matter of what happens after the lockdown gets eased off, particularly if they don’t have the capacity to test and contact trace.

The second impact is the damage on economic activities in African countries, which is brought about by the immediate global reaction to the pandemic, particularly closure of borders with impacts on trade flows and tourism for example, disruption of economic activities within those economies, and collapse of global demand. Examples include the collapse in

demand for oil, with a number of oil-producing countries in Africa hit by this collapse almost immediately. So this is a big set of impacts that we need to deal with. The third impact comes from the global recession, following disruptions both at home and in trading partners. We don't know yet whether the economic downturn we face is going to be V-shaped, U-shaped or L-shaped – if the last of these, we could be faced by a recession as long as that following the global financial crisis. And I happened to have been at the centre of that, as Governor of the Central Bank of Tanzania. Some countries are struggling because they don't have the fiscal space right now to deal with the combination of current crises. We have learnt from the global financial crisis: those countries that did implement some safety-net measures, so as to avoid closure of activities and keep the economy as an ongoing concern, could more easily resume the recovery process. Those that have undertaken enough safety nets to keep SMEs and the informal sector going will probably start the process ahead of those that did nothing.

For those that avoided lockdowns altogether, they might continue with less disruption to the economy because they didn't close down, but there will probably be a cost in terms of lives. I think for the majority of the African countries the big challenge comes from resource constraints, because they entered this crisis with depleted fiscal space, and serious debt distress. A majority are either in moderate or in high risk of debt distress, particularly low-income countries. I think this is going to be one of the biggest challenges. All countries need to take this not as "business as usual" and agree to take some unprecedented measures. I also serve in President Ramaphosa's Economic Advisory Council so I've been able to see pretty close-up this process of managing responses. I think there is a very serious problem of dealing with shocks, which you've ridden through. But in order to go on to recovery you need growth, and a lot of measures required to deal with the problem are on the fiscal side. If you go for fiscal consolidation, all the rating agencies give you good marks, but at the cost of economic recovery. They take the stance that it has to get worse before it gets better. Typically, people say: try get some growth, but at the same time they tell you to start getting the fiscals under control, which doesn't make sense. I have a very clear position. You will have to get the

fiscals under control, but you need time. You need a much longer time frame to work with.

There have been increasing calls for multilateral support for debt cancellation and a moratorium on interest payments for African countries. There doesn't seem to be a unanimous position either within Africa or among creditors. Africa's debt is owned by a variety of creditors, public and private, and the role of China who owns an important part of Africa's debt is also central. What is the fiscal space available for African governments to respond to this? How can the debt issue be negotiated?

I think one has to take into account what countries, including developed countries, have done in terms of dealing with SMEs and corporates that need breathing space for adjustment. A moratorium on debt service has typically been one of the instruments used to provide space for recovery. If the fiscal deficit to GDP ratio, which is considered to be reasonable, is 5%, they should know that you might have to operate in a fiscal scenario which is much worse than that for a while. However, you need to show you have a clear game plan in getting from here to there, where the fiscal deficit will be back at a sustainable level. You need to buy time.

There has been a huge change in the composition of African debt: it's shorter in maturity, and commercial to a larger extent which means reputational risk is a much bigger issue than it has been in the past. That's where the rating agencies come in. Unfortunately, rating agencies have tended to act in pro-cyclical way: when things are bad, that's when they pronounce you to be in really bad shape. African countries now have also to deal with a creditor coordination problem. It used to be the Paris Club and everything was settled there, but now there are new donors like China, and the real question is how does one get coordination among all the creditors to deal with this issue. I also sit in the IDA19 replenishment group: one of the things that was clear was that some multilaterals, eg. IMF, have offered to give Africa a moratorium on debt servicing. But we know a good number of the low-income countries in trouble actually owe their debt to the World Bank, which has not yet provided such help. I think we certainly need a moratorium on debt service, not necessarily cancellation, because a good number of countries have debt to GDP ratios

that are not outrageous. Where it's really hurting is the debt service to revenue ratio. A good number of them have violated the threshold already, and also debt service to export ratio. The debt distress is not largely because of a solvency problem which is measured by debt to GDP ratios. It's not the ability to pay but the ability to convert the national income either through taxation, so that there's enough revenue to service the debt, or to convert it into foreign exchange (forex) so that there's enough forex to meet external debt service obligations.

And finally, China, is one of the key players now. Collectively all debt from other bilaterals together account for a much smaller share of African debt than China's does at the moment. It is very important that debt restructuring continues, such as China's negotiations with Ethiopia. As far as we know, they have agreed a restructure from 7 year debt to almost 30 years, partly because of the maturity mismatch for projects that had not started yielding revenue. Despite this, the country had to start servicing the debt which produced that mismatch. There should be pressure from all other creditors to get China to move towards that much more effectively.

The European Union is proposing a 500 billion Euro stimulus in the next few months. If this stimulus was going to provide the best effects for African economies, how would you like it to be designed? What's going to work best for partner countries in Africa?

In fact 'stimulus' might not be exactly the right word. Maybe 'rescue' is the function that it is supposed to play. My sense would be, just like some countries had done in the global financial crisis from 2008 to 2010, to target particularly those sectors that had suffered most from the shock. So, for example, tourism in this case is going to be a huge challenge because of closure of borders. We know that the bulk of those that spend money and visit are not just on lockdown but also face much more stringent movement restrictions. There are a number of firms that should be protected from disappearing by providing support for them to keep the employees in place and make sure that the equipment and everything else remains ready for the time when revival of trade happens. The same is needed for related activities like travel, airlines, small firms that ferry tourists to and from hotels, and cultural

activities. Tourism is one sector which has the highest backward linkages: if you deal with that you deal with a lot of other sectors. My first application would be to keep a good number of those that have suffered most from this as a reversible shock, as ongoing concerns. Secondly the social safety nets which have typically cushioned the effects on poorer segments of the society: fortunately in a number of countries, there are already programs that have been running and therefore the mechanisms are already there to continue putting resources into. This is just to make sure that segments of society benefit, not just from cash transfers, but help is given to these populations to make sure that their smallholder agriculture activity continues and their children keep going to school. Let's protect human capital from collapsing. It's not just jobs, but also education processes.

COVID-19 has been presented as a moment of reflection for African policymakers on how to rethink development models. Reflections by several organisations like the African Development Bank and UNECA have argued for further economic transformation by adopting measures to diversify economies and integrate the informal sector. How would you reflect on these?

First broadly, I think I agree with that. Responses to the pandemic have laid bare the pivotal roles of both the informal sector in rural and urban settings as well as SMEs in the livelihoods of Africans. This has been the case, notwithstanding all the major efforts we have been involved with, in modernizing our own economies. We have got to make sure that any transformation strategy carries the bulk of those livelihoods in these sectors and to do so by raising their productivity. This is why better connectivity within value chains and also enhanced value realized from their effort, giving them better prices, to reduce their costs, and technology will play a great part of this. Formalization becomes quite important in the transformation process - we have seen that happening in Indonesia and also some examples in Africa. In Indonesia, all the motorcycle riders are now operating under one unit called *gojek*: not only has that allowed them to do their business much more efficiently, but it has also created a basis for them to have safety nets organized for the group of almost 3 million people now. Similar

ones are coming up in Africa, such as Uber-type motorcycles, but localized. These are all sprouting, and they provide a mechanism to really organize this kind of welfare system; when there is such a shock it's possible immediately to have that as a rescue mechanism, so that we are not totally unprepared. So long as more than 60/70 percent of Africans depend on this circuit, we have got to make these sectors much better than they have been. In our own work in the [Pathways for Prosperity commission](#) we have shown how this can be done: taking advantage of the digital economy and there are many solutions.

Secondly, the responses have also demonstrated the role of digital technology in clearly showing that we can reduce the cost of doing development by applying these technologies in the way we deliver services in education and health. We have many examples of how that can be done

Finally, I'm one of the persons that have admired Richard Baldwin's "new stage" globalization story, which is trading labour services via tele-migration. The new stage is driven by a reduction in face-to-face costs, enabling tele-migration. It allows you to separate labour services geographically from labourers. So that people will sit in one nation while working in offices in another nation and the container ship of that tele-migration - as it used to be for trade and globalization - happens to be digital platforms and there are so many of those that are now sprouting. Digital platforms have got to have a much bigger space now. I'll give you an example in South Africa: labour-absorbing digital platforms are helping the country to raise its share of globally traded services. These currently employ almost 255,000 people and projections of interventions hope to raise that number probably by 500,000 in the next decade and it becomes a new source of growth. This is in addition to other initiatives that are aimed at unlocking demand for low-skilled labour via digital platforms. I think these are all very important initiatives that ultimately will start taking jobs to where people are, rather than having to force migration of people from the rural areas into the cities, in order to be able to offer their services. This is going to be the next major big element that needs attention in the transformation process.

Talking about technology, what should be the role of technology in tackling the health and economic effects of the pandemic? How can African governments and populations make use of accessible, quality and affordable technology innovations, especially mobile applications for e-health, e-education provision and chatbots for infection prevention and information?

I think there are a few elements that need to be fixed. First, I think countries have to get digitally ready and this doesn't mean just to have the networks and the infrastructure: it includes enabling all citizens to be able to connect to health service information, be it for public health purposes, be it for treatment. In Somalia, there are solutions now where one doctor can take care of almost 40,000 people through using a mobile phone, and apps are being developed to help doctors also give specialized attention to individuals. You can only do that once you have these sorts of artificial intelligence and mobile phone type initiatives that build platforms for such services. Getting countries digitally ready and inclusive is extremely important. Populations need to have universal access to this kind of technology service, and in order to deal with that, it is important that it is also affordable. In part it will need revisiting business models. We know there are business models that are being developed now with cross-subsidization across market segments just like with electricity: those who use very few units are charged much less than the cost. Those that use more are charged more and you have cross-subsidization which is happening. So I think we just have to make sure we have inclusive coverage, make sure that it's affordable, and that there are solutions that serve the purpose. Otherwise, the big difference between access and use will persist, and part of the reason is affordability and products that make sense to users.

**Takyiwaa Manuh, University of Ghana:
“Governments need to focus more on the
gendered impacts of COVID-19” June 2020.**

Professor Takyiwaa Manuh analyses how the pandemic has disproportionately affected women, especially in Ghana, and describes why governments need to focus more strongly on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 in both their health and economic responses. Takyiwaa Manuh is Emerita Professor of African Studies at the University of Ghana. She served as Director at the Social Development Policy Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Ethiopia, and Professor of African Studies at the University of Ghana where she was also Director of the Institute of African Studies between 2002 and 2009. Her research interests are in African development; women’s rights and empowerment; contemporary African migrations, and African higher-education systems, and she has published widely in those areas. She has practiced as a lawyer, is active in the women’s movement in Ghana and Africa, and serves on the boards of several international, continental and national organizations.



As a first question, we’d be happy to get your take on the immediate consequences of COVID-19 in your neighbourhood and wider region, and your thoughts on whether this crisis can prompt a step-change in direction?

The first few weeks were disorienting but the human condition means we have the capacity to adjust to so many things, doesn’t it? People have lived through worse times and worse conditions. Food systems have been holding up reasonably well, though there were really unreasonable price hikes at the beginning, but what we’re facing now are the usual seasonal shortages. Tomatoes were very expensive, but the prices are coming down. We depend a lot on imports of tomatoes from Burkina Faso, but with the borders shut from March 30th we depend now on local supplies. I learnt recently Ghana has the highest per capita consumption

of tomatoes in the world, even beyond Italians! There are factories now producing tomato paste here in Ghana. During this season, people are eating foods produced locally to a large extent. It’s more about transportation and other supply bottlenecks. A bigger question now is about how we improve agricultural production and storage to decrease food losses, so prices can be kept affordable.

Beyond the immediate personal, social and communal disruptions of COVID-19, I felt optimistic at first. It seemed like an opportunity to usher in a lot of changes in Ghana and across Africa. I am not sure I feel that optimistic anymore. The pandemic is now of unprecedented global dimensions. Perhaps the closest we have come to this before was the Ebola crisis, though Ghana was not directly affected. Rather, we served as a major transit point for many UN operations in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. Then, the world looked on at what was essentially seen as an African problem. Today, this is clearly very different. Fortunately for us in Africa the spread of the disease has been mild, relative to experience in other parts of the world. But I use the word ‘fortunately’ because we are all aware of our fragile health services and our inability to cope with “normal epidemics” let alone such a vicious pandemic. The numbers are low - this morning’s figures show we have just over 11,000 cases and only 58 deaths – but some people suspect we must be missing some deaths. The rate of infection has speeded up, with 500 new cases in 24 hours. The borders are still shut, but the partial lockdowns have been lifted. Schools are still closed, but universities just re-opened for final year students. Next week, final year students in secondary schools and senior high schools are also going back, to allow them to take their final exams. But primary schools and the rest of secondary school students are still at home. We are now allowed gatherings of up to a hundred people, and the churches are re-opening. But with the rising number of cases, they are making wearing of masks mandatory. However, there is still a large share of the population who don’t believe Covid-19 is real, despite the public health education.

There has been some disruption to food chains, especially given the importance of the informal economy to so many people. The partial lockdowns were only in the two main regions,

but these are the dominant regions, so it had an effect throughout the country. The Ghana Statistical Service conducted a survey that used phone records to track disruptions to mobility. They showed people had really slowed down. The school closures have had a big impact, not only the added cost of childcare but many rely on the meals served in schools, or on cooked food served by vendors outside schools. In fact, schools had shut well before the lockdown, so it's been three and half months that children have not been in school. All those small businesses focussed around schools – e.g., transportation and food preparation - have been badly affected, such as small and micro-businesses. Really immense impacts. Unlike in the UK or the US, when you're unemployed here, you can't file for benefits. Those kind of social protection mechanisms don't exist. People aren't being furloughed. If you're in the formal sector, that's different, but given that the majority of people are in the informal sector, they have been left entirely to their own devices.

What is your analysis of COVID-19 seen through the gender lens? What have been the gendered impacts of COVID-19 in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa? Are there specific measures which target women and have been successful?

During the lockdown there was some food relief for the very vulnerable, initially child and girl migrants from the northern regions of Ghana who predominantly work in markets, and often sleep outside on the streets. Many of the girls on the street have had babies, or live in very crowded conditions, so they were the focus of attention.

Initially the focus was on health dimensions, enough protective equipment for doctors, and beds for treating people. We have a Ministry for Gender, Children and Social Protection, but its understanding of gender and even social protection is very limited. There has been criticism of the lack of attention to gender issues and the need to think beyond the very limited social protection measures associated with the most vulnerable girls and young women in markets. There are also many child beggars who disappeared from the streets – was it their sponsors who supplied them with a meal a day? It is unknown.

The government's attention has been more focused on the economy, and you hear very

little about small traders and small holders who are the majority. The National Board for Small Scale Industries has obtained funds from the World Bank funded Coronavirus Alleviation Programme, and is creating a fund for micro, small and medium enterprises. But they require a registration certificate and tax ID number, so it will not include the majority of enterprises in the informal sector. COVID may turn out to be especially costly for women who never had much institutional credit. If they had food stocks they were going to cook, all of this has rotted. Nobody compensated them. The pandemic has exposed the shabbiness of the social protection system which has been conceived in very narrow terms, and even for workers we don't have unemployment benefits, except for those in the formal sector. But 80% of those employed are in the informal sector.

We've been very concerned about the gendered impacts of COVID-19. Government statements hardly mention gender, but mainly focus on the economy. It is expected for instance that GDP growth will fall from more than 6% this year to 2% and this will affect tax revenues, production, trade and commodity prices. Government speaks of these things as if there are no people who lie behind the changes, but just disembodied activities. But when you begin to disaggregate, say the tourism sector, which has been badly affected, you find the hotel industry, food chains, restaurants and catering establishments are run mainly by women, so there's a disproportionate impact. With the borders closed, and restrictions on the number of people allowed to meet, all conferences have been cancelled. Many women work in catering for schools, but that's been wiped out too. It has been extremely costly for women. All their food stocks have rotted, and nobody is compensating them for that.

While COVID is expected to infect men more than women, most care work is done by women, alongside looking after children who are out of school at home. I was conducting interviews on Sexual and Gender Based Violence last week. Young girls complain that they wish they were back in school, rather than working from morning to night at home, while their brothers and male cousins are not expected to do domestic work. So school is seen as a place to escape to, rather than being

at home where they are being asked to work incessantly. Here, the bulk of COVID patients are at home, not in care homes, so the bulk of caring for them is done by women at home.

Hospitals have been overwhelmed and they're not running normal services. Part of the main government hospital in Kumasi has been closed this week because of exposure to some positive cases. They have asked all the doctors and nurses in the unit to self-isolate, so people cannot access normal health services. Pregnant women fear going to hospital, given the risk of contracting the disease, and those who go to hospital encounter long waiting periods.

The incidence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has risen during the lockdown, as people are locked in with their abusers. But it is difficult to get the actual figures, because formal reporting is very low. When you report you must get the hospital to fill out a medical report, which is needed as corroborating evidence for the court, but a fee is charged for this, in contravention of the Domestic Violence Act. While reported figures are hard to come by, there is a lot of anecdotal evidence, for example with girls not being in school, that they are subject to higher risks of defilement and abuse at home.

Last week the President had scheduled a meeting with women's groups, but it was cancelled at the last minute because of an emergency. From the government's side, much of the focus at the meeting would have been on the fund set up for micro and small enterprises. So even when there is a focus on gender it tends to be on the economic aspects, and not on the human rights and bodily integrity of women, which are essentially considered private matters. There is a Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), but it does not operate in all the districts in Ghana and it faces several challenges, while the Domestic Violence Act passed in 2007 is not adhered to fully. Access to justice for those violated is difficult. Some rights groups have been very active. I just read in the papers about a man who had defiled two schoolgirls in Kumbungu in Northern Ghana, and the group and the police had managed to get him to court, where he was convicted and sentenced, but you can be sure that for every one person sentenced there are another hundred or so where the case does not get any attention.

Does this mean civil society organisations have been more active than government in addressing the gendered dimensions of COVID-19?

We have a Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection. Her own understanding of gender issues is rather limited. She made it clear at the start of her tenure that she was more interested in children and social protection. But even then, her understanding of these is very limited. Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) grants are given to some of the poorest households through the Ministry. The focus appears to be more about money and patronage, rather than implementing policy and coordinating across sectors. When you have a Ministry whose own understanding is rather limited and also bureaucratic, and where everything seems to be about funding, then you have a major problem. Of course, funding is important, but so is leadership and vision. There is a danger that some of the gains made could be eroded during these COVID times, especially the work with young adolescent women, which has not been operational during this time.

For government, as long as it can announce that it has set up a fund that will assist women alongside other micro, small and medium operators, that sounds like they are paying attention to women and gender issues. And interestingly a breakdown of people who sent in applications showed 41-59% in favour of women's micro-enterprise activity. But it doesn't follow that the funding will follow the same trend, and it is likely that women's enterprises will receive smaller sums of money. So while the state thinks it can tick the box for gender action, this would not include the majority of women in the market-place who run informal enterprises, and who do not have tax ID numbers or registered businesses.

As I said, I started out being hopeful that massive changes and think-throughs might occur, but I am less hopeful now. I had hoped there might be several needed social reforms. For instance, housing conditions for most people in urban and rural areas in Ghana make it impossible for them to socially distance. The majority live in compound houses, and share facilities with many other people. Such a situation should have generated conversations about housing, water and sanitation, social

security, etc. The trade unions speak up, but generally only about their own members, which are an ever-decreasing share of workers. This should be shaking us up, to tackle for instance the lack of potable water for millions of Ghanaians. But I should add that the government has granted free water, and electricity at half rates to households for 3 months (April-June), as part of temporary relief measures. But we must ask: what are we learning from this crisis to put the needs of people on a new scale? How do we reform health services so they are sustainable, even for poor countries such as ours, to cater to the majority of the population and deliver adequate and quality services?

What were the local innovations in response to the crisis?

One good thing that has emerged is that some local industries have stepped up to meet shortages of hitherto imported products and growing demand; for example, a factory that produces alcoholic beverages not only for Ghana but also Nigeria and some other West African markets, started producing hand sanitisers.. Other factories that produced clothing for export started producing masks and PPEs. So there are some opportunities which are being taken, but the question is, will these be sustained after the crisis?

Another interesting development has been the spate of innovation. Students, lecturers, ordinary people, have all been coming up with innovations. We have something in Ghana called Veronica buckets. The person who invented them worked in a hospital where there were no hand washing facilities. She converted a covered plastic bucket into a container with a tap in the front. You fill it with water and put a basin underneath on a small table. You can then wash your hands under the tap and the waste-water goes into the basin. Now people have come up with new types of Veronica buckets. Some people are using empty gasoline drums and connecting them directly to some source of water using pipes. Some Veronica buckets are now solar powered and use sensors to dispense water and soap. Other people have come up with prototype ventilators. Remember that there was much about ventilators a few months ago. Nationally we had less than 200 ventilators, so this goaded some lecturers and students in technical universities and even some

individuals, to start producing some. And there has been no lack of ingenuity and invention.

My question again is this: how do we nurture this spirit of innovation and turn attention to different sectors of the economy, so we can become more self-sufficient and don't have to import every little thing? Many people are asking themselves, with this spirit of can-do, how do we scale up and lessen our dependence?

At the personal and national levels, there needs to be some introspection about values – what is important to us, what do we care about? All these things should lead to choices in national life. My fear is that we still not tackling deep-seated issues. If we were to wake up one morning in September and the virus had gone away, would we be going back to our old way of doing things, with the World Bank and IMF still telling us what to do?

Many analysts and experts say that now is the time to rethink, accelerate Africa's economic transformation. One of your area expertise is urbanization – how has the pandemic impacted those in slum areas with high density settlement. Will this crisis lead to a rethink of Africa's urban reconfiguration?

The housing situation is very serious not only for slum dwellers but ordinary urban dwellers. We are asking people to wash their hands in homes where there is no running water. What kind of planning should we do to make sure that all homes are connected to a water system? Fecal matter also contributes to spread of COVID-19. It's a recipe for disaster. The more you read about this disease, you realize it will be with us for a very long time, it is not going away any time soon. But many policy makers are thinking, 'here today, gone tomorrow', instead of medium to long-term thinking and planning. How should we plan if we assume this virus will be with us for a long time for housing, transportation, and amenities in urban areas where the spread has been greater. It has been concentrated in urban areas. We must think and plan in a smarter way. My worry is we are not grabbing the few opportunities which exist. Some of the issues are not engaging the minds of bureaucrats. For me it adds up to the urgency of having an effective social security mechanism covering not just people in the formal sector, but the majority of the working population. If we break

this down, inevitably women are in the lower end of earning range and will be more affected.

Mzukisi Qobo, University of Pretoria: “The old mantra about growth has reached exhaustion” October 2021.

Professor Qobo is the Head of the Wits School of Governance, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. He also serves on President Cyril



Ramaphosa’s Economic Advisory Council. In the past, he has held a senior leadership role in government as chief director responsible for developing South Africa’s trade policy at the Department of Trade and Industry. His expertise is in governance, strategy, and political economy. His book, *The Political Economy of China-US Relations: Digital Futures and African Agency*, will be published by Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

Let us start with a general question: what is your opinion of how the South African government has handled the COVID crisis so far? South Africa is the African country with the highest official case rate. How do you assess the policies that were implemented to handle the pandemic?

I think we started very late. It was a very long lockdown because it lasted between March and August of last year, and I think that this period should have allowed us, and many other countries that were in the lockdown phase, an opportunity to build our capabilities, to replenish our resources, to prepare our public health facilities, and to think about a credible plan for how to manage the crisis post-lockdown. I think our responses in the first and the second phase were really poor because we didn’t put in place any of the measures that the government said they were going to put in place, because the primary goal of the lockdown was not so much to get rid of the virus, but to enable the public health facilities to manage the numbers. If you prevent people from interacting, you should slow down the

rate of infection. But that didn’t happen. Instead, what we saw during that period was just a large-scale opportunity for the production of personnel productive equipment that was purchased through private suppliers, and we saw how individuals who were connected to those in government benefited irregularly from that.

As a result, the country’s energies got caught up in that tension. Public trust in government declined, and instead of paying full attention to the challenges at hand, we were trying to tackle corruption at the same time. When the second wave hit in December 2020, we were unable to deal with it. I think many deaths and hospitalizations took place during that period. Then there is the politics of vaccines, and the power play between the pharmaceutical companies and government. Then we got the third wave. Where we did well was in the rollout of the vaccines: we accelerated the rollout and I think now we probably are at above 10% or just under 15% of the population fully vaccinated. Of course, there are a new set of challenges, such as the daily take up of vaccination, which is very slow. The government has again not prepared itself for such eventualities, and we’ve been unable to go out and persuade people to get vaccinated and maybe induce them with incentives. So overall, it’s been a mixed response, but by and large, I think we didn’t do great.

There are several debates currently around access to vaccines in Africa, which brings us to the larger question of local manufacturing. South Africa is one of the few African countries that has the capacity to do so. What is your analysis of the lack of local manufacturing on the continent?

I think it’s a long overdue question because we’ve been through multiple episodes of disease on the African continent. The fact that we don’t have full manufacturing capabilities is a reflection of our weakness and shows that we are not a resilient continent. We are heavily dependent on others, and that’s a function of overall capabilities, such as the number of medical doctors, scientific capabilities, and the delivery mechanisms, like the logistics required to deliver vaccines. I do think that the advanced industrial economies have a heavy responsibility for making vaccines available, because they had promised to donate vaccines via the COVAX facility and there have been very

significant delays. Some countries like Canada purchased doses four times what their population required, and this set the stage for “vaccine diplomacy” and geopolitical competition between China, Russia, and the US for vaccine distribution. But it also intensified vaccine nationalism.

Regarding manufacturing capacities, it’s a very intricate and complex area. If an individual country develops manufacturing capabilities which rely on exports to other African countries, it presents a problem because there might be no market. Vaccines are both a commodity, but they also save lives. And someone has to pay for them. Governments looking at developing manufacturing capabilities need to weigh up the fiscal capacity of government and the need to promote your own manufacturing. If governments can buy vaccines cheaper from outside the continent, why should they not do that? Yet I still think we need to build our own capabilities. These are the moral tensions. The second reality is that African countries don’t have significant scientific capabilities to manufacture vaccines. Just last week, there was an announcement of a major technology transfer initiative to start the early phase of a new vaccine for cancer, in Cape Town which is good.

The final point is that just about every other country on the continent wants to be a vaccine manufacturer. It’s becoming fashionable, so we should find a way to create cross-border supply chains to optimally utilize capacities at different stages of development in various African countries.

It’s been interesting learning from our interviewees about the role of other key actors during the COVID pandemic. What has been the role of national government, provincial government, and civil society during the pandemic? If you take a case like Senegal, which has a fairly strong state, we heard a lot about the importance of local associations, very often religious in origin, that played an absolutely vital role, particularly in the first phase.

I think it’s an important question. Based on my own observation, I think there’s been too great a distance between the state and civil society, and you can see this disjuncture in the narratives about vaccines. Negative messages have evolved and spread in communities and across society about vaccines being poisonous

and other myths. We’ve not been so successful, in working closely with different civic structures, religious leaders and the like, not just in terms of vaccines, but also in terms of helping to build resilience at community level. Many of the most vulnerable communities were heavily affected by lockdown conditions. People live in single-room structures which serve as a kitchen, bedroom, and living space for a whole family. When you lock people up, that means you force them to be in their homes, but you’re not thinking about the differential resources across society. In your head, as a politician and decision-maker, because you live in a comfortable house, you think everyone has a yard to walk around in. I don’t think we considered this sufficiently as a society and country. It could have been handled better if government from the outset had worked with community or civic structures that are facing these difficulties. I think we underestimate the extent to which people have been affected psychologically and emotionally by the first phase of the pandemic. We are now countenancing the fourth phase of managing the pandemic in the next few months, but we’re not treating any of the ill-effects that emerged from each of the previous phases and trying to build greater resilience. One of the fascinating discussions in South Africa currently is whether we should set up a basic income grant, and what form and shape should that take; but this is happening in the abstract, and is not grounded in the realities of what has happened in the last 18 months. We’re not taking into account the depletion of capabilities in communities, job losses and the range of effects that were wrought at a personal, household, and community level. No one wants to think innovatively and creatively, no one wants to shift the box, let alone think outside the box. No one wants to do bold things that have never been done before. Our approach is very linear, which is sad. What government did well was to work with the private sector on the delivery side. As soon as government agreed to partner with the private sector, they moved really quickly from vaccinating 4% of the population to reach 15% within three to four months. That is not to say working with the private sector is a magic bullet for society, but working with key structures in society, including the private sector, could create much bigger gains for government than trying to do it all on their

own.

We are still in the midst of the pandemic, but many governments are already thinking about the post-pandemic world and economic recovery programmes. How does this crisis offer an opportunity to rethink development models on the continent? Regarding health, for instance, more funding for health infrastructure should be at the core of economic policies more generally. Looking at the South African case, and more largely on the continent, how might this crisis be an opportunity to rethink development models?

I certainly agree we should rethink development models. Major crises in history have always forced a rethink in approach, especially in regards to the role of the state, whether it was the depression years of the nineteen-thirties, post-World War two, the recession of the seventies, or during the global financial crisis. A major crisis should force us to rethink how we do things, especially in managing the relationship between the state, market and society. I think these relationships have to be rebalanced all the time. The old mantra about growth has reached exhaustion, and all market actors are going to have to show how they contribute to society, health infrastructure, education, and public services. I think with COVID 19, we are at a crossroads and must re-think economic policy, social policy, and our health infrastructure.

This pandemic came at a time when, in South Africa, we were talking about setting up national health insurance, a programme that had already been delayed for over a decade. It has still not been implemented. One would think that the COVID crisis would force us to get the national health system into shape. I think the crisis gives us a creative opening to experiment with a basic income grant, and other ways to build civic and community capabilities, and not rely narrowly on the market for everything.

The fact that many countries closed their borders means there has been an emphasis on localization, and self-reliance. In some places, there has also been investment in industrial robotics, instead of shifting supply chain production to areas that have abundance of labour. This is especially apparent in countries like China and elsewhere in Asia, which will make it difficult for African countries to

develop manufacturing, so that's the first set of challenges you have.

The second is the whole green transition and risks of a carbon tax adjustment at the border. If African countries still rely on traditional industrialization, their products will attract taxes at the border because their carbon footprint will be deemed too large. We face a real dilemma on the continent, in terms of the pathway to development, and certainly we need to rethink development models, but it's not going to be easy. We should think about reviving agriculture and agro-processing, and areas of the service economy that could help us modernize, but also absorb labour. The major thing we must do is greater investment in education, because as long as education levels aren't high enough, we are going to lag behind other developing and emerging economies. The world is moving on and you have limited options with low skills. It's easy to talk about industrialization, and new development pathways, but if you don't have the critical success factors, education being one of those, you simply are not going to compete in this changing world.

Energy is absolutely critical for economic and industrial development. Currently South Africa has massive dependence on coal for energy and industrial production. I know there's been some work done in South Africa on what a just energy transition would look like. There are massive amounts of labour and capital, and many communities bound up in the current high carbon coal economy. What timeframe do you think South Africa should be thinking about, to try and achieve this remodelling of the whole energy system not only in terms of getting out of fossil fuels, but also expanding energy production so that it becomes available to everybody at reasonable cost?

I don't think it will take less than a generation to achieve a noticeable transition. It's happening in very small steps. Some banks are announcing they will no longer fund coal projects, which is a big step. Companies like Exxaro, which was the second largest coal producer in South Africa, has been making investments in renewable energy in partnership with India's Tata Group, through their spinoff Cenergie. Also, there's a pressure from advanced industrial economies through their support to NGOs in South Africa, which has generated a lot of talk about the green

transition in South Africa, but less about what the “just” component of the transition would look like. The bulk of unemployed people in South Africa, unskilled or semi-skilled, belong to labour-intensive sectors in the old industrial economy. And for the longest period of time, since the seventies, the major driver of employment in South Africa has been industry (largely powered by coal-fired power stations), and all the midstream sectors. If you take that away, you’ve got to deal with the large section of the population that would be unemployed, and all the social challenges that are associated with it.

There’s a lot of talk about climate finance, but it’s all just talk, no-one can see the content. Going back to the question of skills, moving people from old industries to a new industrial sector, you’ve got to go all out in education because the current green jobs are usually unsustainable, and short term in nature. They are like construction jobs. You assemble, with most of the components coming from China, Spain, and Denmark. An important part of sustaining economic prosperity on the back of green transition is for governments to be ready to create incentives and put resources behind such a transition; and place conditionalities for local ownership, training and development, and employment.

Currently there are very few African companies that are manufacturing “green economy” components. We simply are responding to the pressure to reduce our carbon footprint, to meet certain targets, to follow the lead of the EU. No one says we must stick to the old economy, but we’ve got to be careful about how we pace the transition, and how government, the private sector, and communities work together to solve the real equity challenges that this debate throws into sharp relief.

Let me ask a final question on global governance. Generally, the pandemic has demonstrated that multilateralism is key to address global challenges, but we’ve also seen some countries prefer bilateralism and nationalism, as you mentioned early on in relation to vaccines. What do you think will be the future of multilateralism after COVID, and specifically Africa’s place in the international system? I know you have a book coming out soon

on China-US relations and the question of agency. How do you think African actors, African governments, can exercise more agency in this fragmented world?

I think the world will remain fragmented for a while, for a number of reasons. We really underestimate the extent to which the Trump era eroded goodwill in multilateral processes, because the US has always been, since the end of World War two looked up to as the leading power in underwriting international processes and institutions. Post-Trump, the world has battled to rebuild the multilateral foundations, especially because the relationship between the two largest economies in the world - China and the US - has continued to weaken. Today, tensions between the two continue pretty much in the same way as was the case under Trump, except that the tone is slightly more civil. I think the tensions and rivalries are deepening, if you follow the AUSUK submarine story around building military capabilities in Asia Pacific. The flashpoints are going to expand the points of intensity in that relationship. COVID 19 has further driven a wedge between these major powers: the US and China, but also Europe, where the European Union has to think of its future beyond reliance on the US. They have learned a hard lesson under Trump, that you cannot place your faith in the US, because of the nature of their political system, which can bring you a terrible president that takes some crazy positions on international issues. Multilateralism isn’t what it used to be because countries are likely to go down regional routes and worry about their more immediate spheres of influence.

The EU is already in good space because they operate in an integrated area. It’s not a perfect mechanism, but I think the EU has been a source of resilience for its member countries. It’s able to respond pretty quickly to crisis issues, even though they are intense, as for example, in the Eurozone, with the Greek crisis, or to tensions around how countries manage their vaccine supplies, and more recently to issues related to the European economic recovery plan. The tensions are there, but the Union is able to find consensus because everyone knows that if they are invested in the project, it’s good for everyone and no-one would be left behind. I think there’s a lot that Africans can learn from that. Our agency is also

constrained by the behaviour of our elites, corruption, the weakness in the democratic space in different countries, plus state-society tensions in much of the African continent. Among the things that African countries need to do to bolster their agency, many lie at the domestic level. They've got to get the domestic context right, domestic institutions, inclusive institutions, taking care of the economy, and all those basic elements. Secondly to start to look beyond, not only the domestic setting but be concerned about the country and continent's interests, Working together to strengthen certain areas, for example the AfCFTA, gives the continent a rare opportunity to develop cross border supply chains, to harmonize regulations around areas related to services, intellectual property investments, and e-commerce, but also to build some of the key institutions, such as the Centre for Disease Control (CDC Africa), to direct resources to rebuild existing institutions some of which have been neglected. Finally in relation to external action, we must take a more pragmatic posture rather than just put all our eggs in the same basket, whether its China or the US. We must diversify our international relations strategy and know that these other countries are not our friends. They are also in search of their own interests. That's how you've got to approach commercial diplomacy or bilateral relations with these countries. And we must start to develop a "One Africa platform", not on everything, but where it makes sense, especially if by doing so we can derive greater benefits from external engagements. The COVAX and the AU Accelerated programme platform were some of the examples of what is possible, and though I don't think we managed them that well, we have something to build on.

Felwine Sarr, University of Saint Louis, Senegal: "The COVID-19 crisis demonstrates the need to change track and re-think the world of tomorrow" June 2020.

Professor Felwine Sarr, Professor of Economics at the Université Gaston Berger of Saint-Louis in Senegal, reviews the impact of the Covid-19 crisis in Senegal, and the work carried out by the working



group that led to the elaboration of the Senegalese economic and social resilience plan launched by President Macky Sall. Prof Sarr also provides a critical analysis of African debt and the urgent need to rethink economic and development models in Africa. Felwine Sarr has published several books, the latest of which: *Afrotopia* (Philippe Rey 2016), *Habiter le Monde* (Mémoire d'Encrier 2017), *Ecrire l'Afrique-monde* (co-edited volume with Achille Mbembé, Philippe Rey 2017), *Restituer le patrimoine Africain* (Philippe Rey/Seuil) with Benedicte Savoy et *Politique des Temps* (co-edited volume with Achille Mbembé, Philippe Rey 2019).

Senegal was one of the first countries to react quickly to their first positive COVID-19 case in March 2020, and without putting a strict lockdown in place. What is your analysis of the policy measures designed and put in place by the government, especially given the current growth in the number of cases?

I think that Senegal chose to apply those measures which made sense for the situation it faced then. A strict lockdown would have shut down the whole economy, and had an impact on the 97% of enterprises making up the informal sector. The large majority of people in this sector make their living from day-to-day trading and transactions, so it would have been hugely damaging to the productive economy to shut this down, especially with the relatively small number of cases then present. The decision taken, which was an intelligent choice, was to constrain non-essential activity. There had been some large religious gatherings planned in early March, which the government banned. The sectors most affected have been tourism, transport, restaurants and cafés, and the informal economy. Having taken specific

measures, the government decided not to put the country into lockdown, but to reduce activities to a minimum, shut schools and universities, and to manage the situation as it evolved. So far as the economic question is concerned, the Minister for the Economy undertook a joint analysis with the help of many Senegalese economists to think about an economic recovery plan – and I'll come back to that later. Over the first two months of the crisis, the measures taken seem to have worked. Currently the number of cases has been going up, but this is most likely a result of the growth in tests being done. On average, we get around 10% of positive results from the tests done. With 200 tests, we had 20 cases, with 1300-1500 tests, we got 130 new cases. The larger the number of tests, the better we can gauge the actual number of cases. It seems as though there are a lot of asymptomatic cases, and perhaps we're dealing with a branch of the virus which is not as lethal as elsewhere. We're waiting for the scientists to confirm if this is true. As for the measures being taken today, which are easing the restrictions at a time when the number of cases is increasing, I am not convinced that this is the right choice to make.

Why do you consider that the loosening of restrictions being taken today are not the right way to go?

We are currently in a very delicate situation. Yes, the numbers are going up but not exponentially. Nor is there a big growth in the number of deaths. When you compare COVID deaths with the number who die from other diseases or from road accidents, it's not a huge number. In this context, and after three months, it is difficult to maintain this strong focus on prevention, and keep people away from their normal activity. It goes against the grain of everyday life, and you can see the result in fewer people wearing masks and abiding by social distancing rules. After a certain time, the flow of life and activity takes up again, and we need to respond to that most effectively. Several religious leaders have successfully pressed the government to allow the re-opening of places of worship, which I don't think they should have. That said, the churches and a number of big mosques in Dakar have kept their doors shut. The great Massalikoul Djinâne mosque, which covers a very large area, has been able to reconfigure its

prayer-hall to ensure people stay one metre apart. But many of the smaller neighbourhood mosques don't have the room, and people find themselves very close together. In this case, the government has sent a contradictory message by re-opening places of worship, and schools. They continue to demand that people respect the rules and keep their distance, but I get the sense that there has been a significant change in attitude and behaviour, with people feeling able to relax the rules. I don't think it is the right time to release the pressure, though it's true that this is a process of government "learning by doing" without the certainty and with a strategy of steering the ship as the context changes. Somehow, we need to maintain the rigour in applying the rules while re-opening the economy in an organised fashion.

You are a member of the committee put in place by President Macky Sall to develop the economic and social resilience plan. Can you tell us about the plan, what economic measures are being considered in the Plan Emergent Sénégal (PES) post-COVID to respond to the economic consequences of the pandemic?

From the start of the COVID crisis, a number of fellow economists got together and decided they must think through the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the right measures needed to address this. We created a working group, making sure that its composition properly represented the disciplines and expertise needed to cover the many questions generated by the crisis. The Minister of Economy agreed to meet us, and we offered our help to work with his team, which he accepted. We were able to make rapid progress with the work because we had access to all the necessary information, and good collaboration with his staff. I welcome this initiative because I get the impression that civil society, and the academic world, could really bring practical value to understanding and addressing this crisis. It has been very effective, avoided long administrative procedures, and brought real expertise to contribute to the government's responses. I find it excellent that the Minister of Economy accepted this collaboration, and that many of our proposals have been adopted in the national resilience plan. These included: first, particular attention to those sectors most affected by the crisis – tourism, transport, trade, restaurants and other eating places;

fiscal measures to provide a tax credit for businesses; a state contribution to unemployment pay in order to help businesses keep hold of their employees; and a ban on laying off staff for three months. The second major axis addressed the most vulnerable households: Senegal already had a social safety net system covering 580,000 of those households considered most vulnerable, remembering that each household has an estimated 8 to 10 people. The idea was to expand the target group of those most vulnerable to 1 million households, which brings in around 10 million people out of a total population of 16 million, and to provide either urgent food distribution, or a cash transfer. There were two options – financial help, or food aid. We assumed a daily basket of basic foodstuffs which provides 2100 kcals per day, made up of various products. For the cash transfer, we reckoned on a sum which was equivalent to around 60% of need. In the end, we went for the food distribution, since it was more likely that household members would actually get to eat this food, and would avoid the risk of the household head using the cash sum for other less immediate purposes. We also asked ourselves whether the markets would stay open, whether certain products might run out, or the risks run by people congregating in these areas for shopping. The answer we came up with was to go for targeting, using a process well-established by the government. This was reasonably well-carried out, despite questions around the transport of goods and procurement of grain – in essence, it seems that those households most in need did receive the food. The third area we looked at concerned those people working in the informal sector. Remember this is a sector for which data is lacking, so we had to ask ourselves how best to reach those most affected. Through cash transfers to households in the third income quintile and those reliant on migrant remittances, we could reach them. One of the final questions was to think through how to maintain people working in this sector, and ensure that their activities did not disappear once the crisis had passed. One path would be to use state procurement to source from this sector.

Once the state had put this plan in place, the next question put to the minister was how to prepare for recovery post-crisis. For this, we discussed options with his team and came up

with a plan to re-orient and re-structure the economy. Our founding principle has been to avoid going back to the former pattern of growth, because the crisis has made evident the country's vulnerability to food insecurity, reliance on primary production, lack of autonomy, weak human capital, as well as weaknesses in those sectors which should be truly strategic: such as pharmaceutical drugs, and agriculture. How can we « profit » from the opportunity presented by this crisis to re-think the structure of our economy? Let's re-think how we produce, patterns of growth, distribution of wealth, notions of value, etc. The minister was keen on these ideas and our taskforce has been undertaking a profound reflection on what would make our economy more resilient, more autonomous, responding to fundamental needs, and nourishing life itself.

Here we are today, with the rainy season beginning, and lockdown measures in place. There could be a risk that many young migrants in the city would be stopped from going back to rural areas in order to protect farming populations from the pandemic. At the same time, farming families need all their workers to get the agricultural season underway. How should these risks be managed?

Of Senegal's 45 departments, 23 have not been touched by the pandemic, mainly rural areas. The government wants to keep this part of the country safe, by banning transport between major cities. President Macky Sall in his latest speech announced they were thinking of lifting this ban on inter-city transport, to enable people to return to cultivate their family land. And in the last week, this ban has indeed been lifted. We are on the look-out for two dangers: the first is making sure that people can prepare properly for the farming season; before it starts, you need to make sure that seed and fertiliser have been distributed. I am not sure right now where we are with preparing for the farming season, but I know the Minister of Agriculture is concerned that all preparations be made. We have a second worry about the possible arrival of locusts from East Africa, from Ethiopia above all, and their anticipated arrival in West Africa. A locust threat has been announced and measures should be taken to avoid them crossing the Sahara Desert and arriving here. Equally, the rainfall forecasts for this year are not very promising. So, we face three challenges: effective preparation for the

farming season, likely poor rainfall, and the locust threat. A number of ministers are working together to agree the measures needed.

Senegal relies on significant imports of rice: trade flows have been disrupted and a number of commentators predict there will be a major impact on importing nations. Has there been an increase in the price of rice and other cereals in Dakar, and Senegal more broadly?

In Senegal, we have prepared in order to avoid such a shortage. We are currently eating what we produced last year. In terms of what's on the market, there is no apparent scarcity, but there is always the risk that other countries will engineer an artificial shortage to push up prices. We've been holding meetings with neighbouring countries to avoid "free-riders" and make sure some people don't profit from this crisis through speculation. At present, there doesn't seem to be a problem. My worry is for next year, given that grain harvests are likely to fall around the world, following this crisis. I think Senegal needs around 2m tons of rice per year, of which 1.1m tons are produced domestically, part of which is exported. There are a number of issues: we have a programme to speed up production and reach self-sufficiency in rice. Local rice production has grown a lot in recent years, but it seems that however much we expand domestic production, a significant part of this is exported and not consumed at home. Several reasons are put forward for why this is: the quality of the rice, the fact that it is not "twice-broken" and that the food habits of the Senegalese are to prefer Vietnamese rice which has been broken twice. We need to change people's food preferences to eat more rice from the Senegal River Valley and Casamance. I think we should restrict imports of certain food products in order to stimulate local production and distribution, as we already have in place for several months to cover onions and tomatoes, so local consumers are forced to buy local foodstuffs. We need to take decisions of this sort in a number of strategic sectors. For grains, we expect the difficulties I mentioned to emerge next year.

There are mixed views on debt cancellation, both amongst African governments and between the different creditors. Some countries like Senegal are asking for the cancellation of debt, others want a moratorium, and yet others like Benin

want neither one nor the other. What is your view of this issue? And putting debt on one side, what other financial instruments might African governments use given the very tight fiscal space within which they find themselves?

Let's remember certain basic facts of history: in the 1980s and 90s, African countries became very heavily indebted with ratios of debt/GDP which approached 100%. During the 1970s, they had benefited from the recycling of petrodollars and better commodity prices. But it became clear that the industrialisation strategies many countries were pursuing were "white elephants" of low value. With the subsequent fall in commodity prices, many countries found themselves in a debt crisis. There was a big movement to get debt cancelled, with initiatives such as the Highly Indebted Poor Country programme (HIPC), and the Gleneagles summit for debt cancellation in 2005. As a result of these initiatives, most African countries were able to return to sustainable levels of debt to GDP. Senegal for example has a ratio of 20% for debt/GDP. Following such a major effort between creditors and donor governments, the question was raised – how to prevent us finding ourselves in the same situation in 10-15 years' time? This question must address the structural reasons for such debt. Those who are seeking debt cancellation are putting forward a number of arguments. Economic reasons include: the heavy weight of debt service obligations on government budgets, which is returned to the creditor instead of being invested in schools and health. There were ethical and moral arguments about the "odious" nature of this debt, and that Africa owes nothing because her resources are sold at such low prices globally. There have also been technical arguments put forward. The situation today shows the ratio of debt to GDP for Africa as a whole is 60%, which is broadly sustainable, and less than France at 110%, Japan at 200% and the USA at 108%. African debt is less than 0.3% of world debt, which means it is really negligible. Those pushing debt cancellation use this last point in particular. But it seems a very short-term position to take, specific to today's situation but without a solution to longer term questions of economic sustainability. It is also costly in terms of the message it gives out.

Personally, I am against debt cancellation for a

number of reasons. First, it puts us in a fatalistic position of being unable to pay our debts; we take out a loan and when it falls due, we say *urbi et orbi* we're not able to pay and demand that it be cancelled. I find it lacking in self-respect, given the commitments we have taken out, most of which (apart from China) are at preferential rates. If you take out a loan, it should be to invest in your economy so that it grows and generates resources that will allow you subsequently to repay the loan. It is your future income which you're bringing forward to the present time. When an entity provides you with a service by offering liquidity today in exchange for payment later for future revenue, it is for you to make good this bet on the future. These repeated calls for debt cancellation avoid us asking important questions about how the money has been used, the use of our own resources and how to mobilise finance domestically. For me, if Africa really wants to take itself in hand and exit from a subordinate position, it shouldn't be relying on compassion and pity. Instead we should seek to address the challenges, putting the continent forward as an equal, in so far as its possible, and take on its responsibilities.

Besides, the argument about debt being odious no longer applies. Certainly, there are asymmetric economic relations with the rest of the world, which we should push back on. We ought to refuse to sell our raw materials at absurdly low prices, and refuse to sign contracts for exploiting our natural resources which provide us with such a low share of the wealth they generate. These are power imbalances which we must tackle, but we should not address them through the debt question. We need to face up to them in their proper context, where they are evident. If you don't repay your debts, the interest rate goes up, your ranking in the markets is impacted and you send out a signal that your word and commitment are not to be believed. This is especially important because in recent years a large part is private debt. If the level of debt is broadly sustainable, I don't know why we should seek cancellation. African debt has become a totem, a symbol of some great burden that Africa has to carry for ever. "Africa is weighed down utterly and can never find a way out" has become the mantra. No-one looks properly at how things have changed and where we are today. We have only to mention African debt and compassion oozes out in all

directions...with the voice of the good Samaritan heard everywhere.

But currently, we're really not in such a bad situation. Granted, across the continent it's a mixed picture – take the two giants, Nigeria has a ratio of debt/GDP of 15% and South Africa its around 55%. Angola has a ratio of 90% and Tanzania 71.8%. In these circumstances, I don't see why we are calling for cancelling all African debt. It would be better to take individual countries and address their specific circumstances. Some have significant private sector debt and are keen not to see their credit rankings suffer, so they can continue to raise money on reasonable terms. For others, the situation is different – we need specific treatments, not blanket coverage. We must also focus attention on mobilising more substantial domestic resources, and ensure they can be put to use in financing our own economic growth, enlarging the fiscal base. For example, there are significant fiscal resources linked to land and property which we have not tapped, and much unpaid urban residential tax. A lot of work needs to be done to mobilise domestic resources on the one hand, and on the other stem illicit financial flows out of the country, such as via multinational companies which do not pay their taxes, and make sure we invest our money productively. These structural measures need to be put in place.

Sub-Saharan Africa, along with China perhaps, will be the only regions of the world in which there is a positive rate of growth this year, despite this being insufficient. Let's not be alarmist. Each year, organisations flag catastrophes which don't in fact eventuate; it's a means to raise funds which they claim will prevent such a disaster occurring. The African continent has great strengths and resources with which to address its challenges. In holding out our hand, at a time when we don't really need help, we lose the important symbolic benefit of having shown we're trying our best. I am not against international solidarity, but it needs to be mobilised with self-respect and dignity. There are countries in Europe and Asia who are thinking of mutualising their debt – we should think about how we, as Africans, can develop such a mutualisation of our resources, and build solidarity in the face of common challenges – but this is very different from calling for debt cancellation. Our Central Banks have an important role to play in financing our

economic development, the volume of funds injected so far for the COVID-19 crisis could be significantly increased.

A good number of analysts agree that this pandemic provides a valuable opportunity for African countries to re-think their development models, accelerate regional integration, diversify the economy, pursue greener growth.... Do you also think we're really at an economic turning-point for the continent, and what pathways and direction would you propose?

I have already laid out my views about the need for a radical change in economic model for Africa's development in my book « [Afrotopia](#) », involving deconstruction and reinvention of development as a concept. In the African context, I felt quite alone in taking this path. Then, Kako Nubukpo wrote an important book « [L'Urgence africaine](#) » in which he advocates a change in economic model. Our voices were thought at the time to be rather utopian, with few concrete measures that could be taken forward in our neo-liberal world, where we needed to integrate into global supply chains. It has been really interesting to see how these ideas have now become mainstream thinking over the last 3 months in Africa, and everywhere else. We have rarely heard so many people in social and intellectual circles express the desire for building a new and different world. Why? Because most of those dreaming of a better world have been witness to an historic experience – we have all seen how for 3 months, the capitalist juggernaut could be halted. We've seen global industrial production fall by 80%, pollution levels in cities like Beijing have dramatically fallen, rivers have been re-born in a clean state, the inexorable march of global capitalism has ground to a halt, and we have come to recognise the enormous and fundamental value of many jobs in the caring professions. We have come to see that some parts of the economy are essential, others are not. These are not abstract ideas, they are lived realities for us all. Those who see this as a turning point are right, because at this moment there is an opening in a historic process when a range of different pathways open up. That's not to say that this opening will shut down, that these different pathways will win out, but yes – this is absolutely a time which must be seized. There are moments in every country's history which are much more propitious than others.

This crisis shows up those things which cannot last, and demonstrates the need to change, and construct a different kind of world. The African continent has all the potential to be self-sufficient in food, but cannot exercise ownership over the many resources which are exported. African leaders need to learn lessons from this crisis and that now is the time to construct an economy which serves the needs of their own populations above all. A further question concerns how to translate our collective intelligence as regards the theory into practical measures which transform society. These are the questions we, as African economists and academics, need to work on. Theoretical analysis is in vain if it cannot be translated into practical detail. How might we inject this intellectual added value into social mobilisation which leads to a real change in how our politicians govern us? This is a field in which people need to redefine politics in a way which allows citizens to re-discover their energy and capacity to shape their destiny. This is the battle for now, today. Who should do it, and by what means? Together we must find the answers urgently.

Njuguna Ndung'u, African Economic and Research Consortium: "COVID-19 is a wake-up call to reform the healthcare system and make it inclusive for all" July 2020.

Professor Njuguna Ndung'u, a Kenyan economist, Director of the African Economic Research Consortium ([AERC](#)), a pan-African organization devoted to the advancement of economic policy research and training in sub-Saharan Africa, and former Governor of the Central Bank of Kenya (2007-2015) analyses how the pandemic creates more fragility in African economies, but also how reforms could be implemented during this crisis; and the urgent need for investment in strong health institutional capacities



The first question we'll ask is not only in your role as Executive Director of AERC but also as former Governor of the Central Bank of Kenya - what is your analysis of the Kenyan government's response to the health and economic dimensions to the pandemic?

This is an interesting question and requires us to look beyond Kenya and across Africa. The pandemic found almost all African economies in a very tight position in terms of fiscal space, despite several advisory policy papers on building economic resilience for many years. The first thing when a pandemic hits is to save lives. But this assumes you have the capacity and capability to do that. But with diminished fiscal space, and dilapidated public health care infrastructure, the economy has no ability to do this immediately, unless by re-allocating resources to cope with the virus. In most cases resources are re-allocated from the economic development budget to cope with the crisis and so robs the economy of the capacity for future growth. The current pandemic is not like other exogenous shocks where people believe it is short term. Rather this virus has shocked and gripped the whole world, and nobody is left out. Second, what kind of short-term measures are necessary? For me, testing, contact tracing and lockdown were all very important steps along with social distancing and putting people in quarantine. This induces personal responsibility for self-preservation. After that, it's a question of measures, such as large-scale education about PPEs for self-preservation, because governments in Africa don't have the means to provide this for everyone. The lockdown was very quick and covered the important areas, but there is always a big problem in terms of the balance between saving lives through lockdown, to contain the infection, but then what happens to people's livelihoods during the lockdown? Most Africa governments do not have a credible safety net system or even an efficient basic social protection programme, so obviously it is very difficult to manage the lockdown. People in urban areas must go to work in order to put some food on the table. Many small businesses thrive based on opening their doors – we cannot make an assumption that they have savings that can cushion them during the lockdown period. In addition, there are many people employed in the hospitality and service industry, and as soon as the lockdown was announced they lost their jobs. It speaks

volumes about our labour laws, institutional cushioning, and insurance mechanisms. These are some of the pitfalls we faced. We never thought about the type of safeguards required across economic sectors.

There is the question of healthcare financing and also affordability across the country. Why has the government not introduced the nationwide reforms aimed at a universal healthcare system with insurance and social safety nets? It is time to focus now on how this crisis can have positive ends. How can the government reform the healthcare system and infrastructure to make sure it is improved and universal? There is no need for more excuses, we don't know where the next pandemic will come from. We need a universal healthcare system that is affordable for all. In Africa we have weak institutions. In Kenya, for example, we have different levels of health service for each hospital – for example, there are level 4, or level 5 hospitals – but there are in deplorable conditions. Why? They are administered, but medication and facilities do not get to them - they leak to other channels, mostly private. Governance and institutional issues prevail. The other day, the Cabinet Secretary argued that Ministry of Health officials are very dedicated, but there are just some bad apples there. My response is that the bad apples excuse is a refusal to implement far reaching reforms. We should also focus on the availability of protective equipment and its quality. For masks and sanitisers – who has verified the standards for these products? In countries like ours, with a large informal sector, these businesses are quick at innovating to address the current constraints. Inappropriate PPE will give a false sense of protection and this where the second wave of the pandemic will stem from. In summary, an effective and efficient supply of standard PPEs, an efficient safety net programme will both be key elements to an effective lockdown. There seem to be good lessons to pick from this experience now. Kenya should take advantage to streamline the response, and undertake policy and administrative interventions.

You mentioned healthcare financing. There had been calls for adequate financing of healthcare prior to the pandemic. These are not new demands. In your opinion what factors lie behind the lack of meaningful investments in health on the continent? Is it a financing issue or

lack of political commitment or both? What solutions might address this issue?

This is a difficult question because of the balance between the resources available and the kind of healthcare system you want to build on one hand, and the poor institutional DNA we seem to perpetuate on the other. It is interesting to look at the proportion of the government budget which goes to Ministries of Health and what share of this actually delivers health care, given the cost of wages and salaries. But I do not think it's really a financing issue, it's more a question of the efficiency with which these resources are used. It is an institutional failure problem, as the resources are there, allocated from the national budget, and well supported by international funders. The Kenyan Ministry of Health is a devastating example with the interplay of so many actors. It is not the curative system which is the problem here. It is supplies of the pharmaceuticals and equipment, on one hand, and physical infrastructure required on the other. This is where institutional failure drives policy failure. The import of drugs is a very big business. Let us look both at delivery of healthcare and the supply of drugs and equipment, which is where the massive leakage occurs. Several examples show medical insurance does work in a limited way but public hospitals are understaffed. The Government has had to contract Cuban doctors, to fill the gap. But a sustainable long-term solution needs an effective incentive mechanism for doctors in the public healthcare system. In addition, to be innovative in providing solutions that will sustain the management side of equipment and drugs, we need urgent reforms to human resource management and finance. Maybe this will be the best outcome of this crisis, because it will show how far we have failed and what we need to do. In Africa, there is a dichotomy between government-financed hospitals and private hospitals. Most people who can afford it, will go to private hospitals, where they will receive better care and appropriate diagnosis, but they have to pay for it, often using their insurance. But the majority, who cannot afford to go private, must go to government hospitals, given that it is free or with low user charges, but you get very poor service. Doctors may see you, and provide the diagnosis but you must then go and buy the drugs from the private pharmacies, which creates another market. If admitted for

treatment, the majority will not make it, it is like they go to public hospitals to die! Perchance this is a wake-up call to reform the public healthcare system, and really make it inclusive. We can see examples from urban healthcare centres and hospitals every day, but the experience in rural areas is much worse.

We started this conversation with discussion of the limited fiscal space which most African countries face. Where do you think the Kenyan government could generate greater fiscal revenue?

I was just in a conversation with a friend of mine at the Bill and Melinda Gates' Foundation, about the optimal taxation options, the choice of tax instruments and domestic resource mobilization. We have seen with Covid-19 a surge in the growth of digital platforms, retail electronic payments platforms and businesses, aided by the technological advances in East Africa, especially Kenya and Tanzania, where it has really been working very well. I published a [paper](#) a couple of years ago in Brookings, on taxation of digital financial transactions. My point was that it was the poor people who are using these retail electronic payment systems. If you tax them, you disincentivise them. It is not a booming sector or sub-sector as such. Let us also think about the instruments used for taxation. In 2001, I wrote a paper on the optimal taxation of alcohol products. Every excise tax has a Laffer curve effect. The Kenyan government was taxing alcohol at different levels, depending on the product. Beer was taxed at a different level from wine, spirits and aperitifs. The tax on beer, was high because of its volume, but was discouraging beer consumption, rich people were upgrading consumption to wine and spirits, and poor people were downgrading consumption. But there were no guaranteed products below beer, so this created a market for illicit alcohol, which of course was not being taxed. So, the government was losing revenue. Over the last fifteen years illicit alcohol has claimed the lives of three generations of young people, as they cannot afford beer. At that time, I argued with the then Minister of Finance to think about the optimal rate of taxation, and rationalise tax across alcohol products, that is base the tax rate on alcohol content – get more tax revenue, capture all, encourage decent consumption and above all, less distortion in the market. There is a disconnect between Ministers of Finance on

the one hand and the revenue authorities on the other, who should be in a good position to advise the Ministry on which tax instruments work best and how might you implement them. Most people are willing to pay tax if you make it simple enough in terms of application and payments. Governments in Africa can improve their tax efforts and revenues, but they need to change gear. I do not think it works well if a product is taxed at 90% because this is punitive. We tax what we can get. If we control imports, then most of the tax revenue will come from imports, the domestic price pass-through will be proportionate. And VAT is coming from sales in the market, so it reflects consumption. With Covid-19, we started from a low base, then followed by a lockdown which cut the revenue further, in a downward spiral. The AERC had a special session on the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic in African economies, last Tuesday, 30th June, 2020 and someone from the Kenyan National Treasury argued that they had registered a 25% fall in terms of tax revenue. So, the government started with limited fiscal space, and has faced a further revenue decline. Inevitably there must be a lot of expenditure reallocation. Often there is not much flexibility, so what is reallocated comes from the development budget. This has the effect of eroding the economy's capacity for future growth and resilience. We have talked for many years about economic diversification, structural transformation, and developing agro-industries, but governments have never taken it seriously, and have failed to create the relevant climate and environment.

On Monday, June 29th, 2020 the AERC held a plenary session and four commissioned papers were presented on "Business environment: Competitiveness and growth in Africa". One of the papers was given by Prof Shanta Devarajan on African Competitiveness: What do Natural Resources have to do with it? He made the point that the effect of natural resources is not the well-known Dutch-disease effects, but rather the indirect effect on governance, public expenditures, and competitiveness, with regular cycles of commodity booms. His conclusion - the booms and busts of natural resource wealth and associated government revenues create a very uncompetitive environment.

But now let us connect the dots from the

results of this pandemic - from our policies on taxation to our development discourse, to our enabling environment for markets, we have all failed institutionally and that's why the markets have failed. We should ask ourselves how do we manage major structural reforms? My organisation, the AERC, was started in 1988 because of the structural adjustment programmes. It was felt that government officials would not implement those programmes because they were not well understood. Most of our difficulties are due to problems of institutional failure. We have more capacity today than when AERC started, so we should reform institutions and markets.

In our conversations with a number of African thinkers, connecting structural economic transformation and post-Covid recovery paths has been central. They all agree that now is the time to accelerate change and rethink development models, finding a role for green growth. What for you should be the priority policies for African governments looking forward?

First priority, we have to institute reforms in areas where we require different actors to enter the institutional DNA. We must remove the incentives to resist change and reforms. When this pandemic struck, the AERC we had just finalised a project on the fragility of growth in Africa. We focused on fragile economies suffering from conflict, but we also included economies dependent on commodity prices, whose volatility creates a fragile context, as well as weak institutions that condemn African economies to a low-level equilibrium trap. When Covid-19 struck, we came back to these original ideas since the pandemic creates more fragility. It is a crisis but actually reforms occur during a crisis, because people say, "never again shall we repeat this". So, we must diversify the economic base. The debate on diversification, and economic transformation is written in all policy papers for the last 50-60 years, but little has taken place. It is time now to focus on using our relative comparative advantage – that is agro-industries – and how we are going to succeed. The import-substitution model failed because we couldn't push it to the next level. Primary exports failed, and we got nowhere because we are in the periphery in of global value chains. In addition, we are living in the 4th industrial revolution, which everybody is

talking about - the digital revolution. We must be ready for it. I have fought hard for digital financial innovations to work in Kenya, since 2007. When I won the battles with the market, I realised there were battles with politicians to be won as well. They could not believe what people were saying. They could not process the information fast enough. But today they agree it is working very well. There is now support and an inclination to drive the digital revolution to the next level and use it to develop markets. In my [last paper](#) I talked about digital technology and state capacity, and I mentioned four areas we need to develop in Africa. One is connectivity. Nobody should be left behind. The East Africa region is succeeding because we have fibre optic cables across most urban centres, and even now fibre optic is moving to the rural areas in Rwanda and Kenya. Good connectivity is the base for market innovation and flow of information. Second is market development, so that all elements are compatible and interoperable across retail electronic payments and digital platforms. We started with retail and have gone onto digital financial platforms, and a growing range of services through digital means. Third, there is a need to secure the market by identifying who is participating in the market and payment platforms – we need electronic identification systems, E-ID. Fourth state and institutional capacity can ruin innovation in the market. Innovations must be encouraged. And the state must not stifle new forms of economic activity and investment. We also need institutions which can protect the markets, they should know how each market is working. We need institutions that can regulate the market, by nudging it in the desired direction and show-casing best practices. The regulator is very important in developing the market.

Let me now go back to industrial growth. If we start with agro-industry, we must ask what will transform that sector? Rural population and smallholder farmers have been impoverished waiting for these reforms and value addition for their primary produce. And it is the 4th industrial revolution that will be the answer. When we look at the characteristics of East Asia and see whether they can be replicated in Africa, we don't find an obvious route. Look at global value chains: the problem is that value does not come to African producers. I do hope we have leaders who can shine a light on these

issues and see how to take advantage of the 4th IR especially after Covid-19. Electronic payments have worked very well. They had to raise the threshold of how much cash you can put in your phone and how much you can spend every day, to alleviate constraints during the lockdown. It just needed direction, support and regulation to make sure the market went in the right direction. We could have done the same with other sectors of the economy, but where were they? It is my very strong conviction we need reforms in two areas – protect private investment to secure decent jobs, and protect markets which will accelerate economic recovery. We can start now – we do not have to wait for Covid-19 to be resolved, using the tools we have, we can move in that direction.

The EU-Africa summit is coming up in October. Europe wants to see a new relationship develop with African partners, and they are pushing a green economic recovery post-Covid. Does Europe matter anymore to countries like Kenya – is it still relevant? Should African countries follow a green economic agenda? What would be top of your agenda for the Africa-EU Summit? And how do you see the role of China in all of this?

Europe is still very relevant to Africa and African economies, because production and market structures are very similar, having been developed from the same ideas. Some people jump to trade and reforms to the WTO, but for me it is more important to reform global value chains, in terms of where production, value addition, and marketing take place. Current value chains generate low value in Africa and high value elsewhere. It is the oligopolistic nature of markets, sustained by weak institutions and poor governance in African economies. We cannot share in the gains of production and trade. Africa does not process most of its raw materials. If African economies move into agro-industries, the global value chain mechanism has to change and re-balance the distribution of rewards. It will not destroy global value chains, but it must reform them to cater for more balanced resource flows upstream and downstream. Second, we have seen climate change is becoming a very challenging issue. I was at the Central Bank for 8 years. One of the factors that gave me sleepless nights was the emergence of drought. A drought has so many implications for

monetary policy. Drought, especially in the Horn of Africa, affects food supply, food prices, and energy prices. Food prices because of production, energy prices because we depend on hydroelectricity. With drought, electricity becomes more problematic, and petroleum has to be used to run generators. There is thus inflation coming from the supply side and monetary authorities only have demand side tools to deal with inflation. Using demand side tools will push the economy into a recession but has to be used to dislodge a plateau of high prices. The green agenda for me is the way to go. We must invest heavily for sustainable solutions. Our production processes can be built on green energy. It's a question of getting the right incentives.

On China – why did China come in and Europe didn't recognise what was happening? China has made resources available for physical infrastructure. For Africa this is a very important investment. And it is complementary to private investment in that it lowers transaction costs and enhances the profitability of private investment. It is also critical to develop an effective competitive private sector. The China model has come with technology to build this infrastructure, but unfortunately also it also been accompanied by a declining discipline in terms of how those resources have

been disbursed, projects implemented, and the cost of those projects. In a majority of the cases, there has been no scrutiny of these deals. Africa had its own problems in accessing financing, so China was really important. Europe had its own problems following the global financial crisis and the debt crisis on debt. China came to fill the void. But for governments without sufficient controls, they will be paying for these projects and the debt accrued for generations to come. While many of them are good projects, they were procured in a very expensive way. For the future, there is a lot of investment space in Africa, for those who want to participate in African economies. But we need order and stronger institutions to protect markets, production processes, investments and get an appropriate share in the global value chain ecosystem. Whenever there are institutional failures, there will be serious policy failures that create problems for everyone in households, markets, governments and even political circles. We are proud at AERC for having developed and supplied capacity building across many African economies and institutions. We need investment in building more capacity to reach a critical mass across critical institutions in African economies to drive reforms for growth, development and shared prosperity.

Dealing with Structural Change in Africa

**Kako Nubukpo, University of Lomé: “COVID-19 shows that global value chains shouldn't keep Africa in chains of dependence”
September 2020.**

During this interview, Professor Kako Nubukpo, Dean of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Lomé, Togo and former Minister of Prospective and



Evaluation of Public Policy of Togo considers the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis and its repercussions on monetary policy and fiscal reforms underway in West

and Central Africa today. He has recently published [*L'urgence africaine: Changeons le modèle de croissance*](#), Odile Jacob Editions, Paris, September 2019. Professor Nubukpo is also Director of the Observatory for sub-Saharan Africa at the Jean-Jaurès Foundation in Paris, researcher at the Centre for International Cooperation for Agronomic Research for Development (CIRAD), Member of the Scientific Council for the French Development Agency (AFD), and Board Member for the Foundation for Agriculture and Rural development in the world (FARM). He is fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Nantes, and is a former Oxford-Princeton Global Leader Fellow.

What analysis do you make of the Togo government's approach to managing the COVID crisis, the measures taken and initiatives such as

the cash transfer programme “Novissi”?

Togo decided to deal with COVID-19 by quarantining people by region. There are five regions in Togo: from north to south Savanes, Kara, Central, Plateaux, and Maritime. It was possible to move about within each region but not to move from one to another. At the same time, the government banned the “Zemidjans”, which are the widespread motorcycle taxis which you find throughout the country. It was a difficult choice between keeping lock-down, which certainly reduced the risks of the pandemic spreading, and the urgent need for those people with little or no access to any form of social security to leave their homes and find income-generating activities. The majority of working people are in the informal sector, and rely on daily income rather than a monthly salary. In practice, the government did not implement the ban on motor-cycle taxis, given the evident risks to public order this might have provoked in a country in which our economic dynamism depends greatly on the *Zemidjans*, which is such a popular means of transport, though with its own dangers. It is cheap and ensures that the links between the different markets in Lomé and the interior of the country can operate effectively. So, in terms of the trade-off between lock-down and continuing economic activity, I should say we were somewhere in the middle. Some institutions were shut down, like our universities, religious buildings, bars and restaurants, all of which reduced the risk of infection, while at the same time recognising that we needed to maintain some level of public services. For those in government employment, we adopted a continuous working day, thereby reducing working times. Throughout, there was no shutdown of public services. The Government established a special health centre dedicated to COVID treatment, which generated a lot of argument about the effectiveness of the treatment methods, since we are in a country which has, for example, few ventilators. The official figures tell us of twenty deaths in Togo from the pandemic, which puts us with those other countries in which the deathrate has been very low. It seems that such low mortality is quite widespread – if you take the whole of the continent, in mid-August 2020, Africa has had 3% of the global deaths despite our population representing 17% of the global total. However, perhaps we should be careful about making bold statements, as in

the last few weeks there has been a resurgence of cases in South Africa, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria and Ghana. But overall, it is clear that COVID has been weaker and less virulent in Africa than had been feared. Even if we accept that our statistical services are not brilliant, people know each other well and if there is an unexplained death in the family, it gets reported. Despite this subjective proxy measure, we can nevertheless state without too great a risk of being proved wrong, that Togo and sub-Saharan Africa have been spared too great a loss of life, for which I am profoundly grateful. The multiple information campaigns sensitising people to the importance of wearing masks, and keeping a safe distance from others, have certainly played their part, as has the closing of land and air frontiers.

How do you view the economic response in Togo, and how might the pandemic affect economic and monetary policy in Africa?

So far as the economic response is concerned, for a number of years the Ministry of Development in Togo has been trying to reach the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society, through the National Fund for Inclusive Finance (FNFI). This mechanism has been in place for the last 7-8 years, and has gradually expanded, providing a means to get resources directly to those in greatest need, but with the duty of reimbursing such funds. Hence, the COVID response was greatly aided by the work done over previous years to set up this system for monetary transfers, known as Novissi, which enabled the government to respond rapidly to people’s immediate financial needs. Having said that, it would be good to evaluate rigorously the actual impact on those Togolese households who did receive money, and to understand why numerous people were excluded. This micro-economic response is similar to the “*bolsa familia*” put in place in the 2000s for poor households in Brazil by President Lula.

From a macro-economic point of view, Togo had launched her National Development Plan (PND 2018-2022) two years ago, with three major priorities: the first has been to make Togo’s port at Lomé a logistical hub, building on the country’s corridor position in West Africa, which offers critical transport routes to landlocked countries further north. The second is based on establishing “agro-poles”, which

can become centres of agricultural and food processing, and the third is investment in social services and strengthening human capacity. One of the lessons Togo might draw from the pandemic is whether they have got the right balance between these three priorities: the third had been allocated fewer resources than the first and second, but COVID has shown up the blind-spots in Togo's development and more broadly in Africa, in terms of resources devoted to the SDGs, and above all to health. This crisis has shown us that the African continent needs to give greater attention to social services, education, health, training and even data collection, since we need more effective statistical agencies.

Reflecting on Senegal's amendments to their national development plan 'Plan Sénégal Emergent' (PSE) and other African countries who are also now adjusting their development plans, do you think Togo will need to make changes to its National Development Plan (PND)?

It is inevitable that we will make changes to the PND and revise our macro-economic projections, since we had not taken a pessimistic scenario into account. Rather, we had assumed an on-trend case with GDP growth of 5% and a second, more optimistic scenario of 7% per year. The World Bank reckons that African countries as a whole are likely to see their GDP fall by 5%. At the start it was predicted closer to a 2% fall in GDP, but now it is looking more like 5%. Given the significance of the GDP growth rate for all other macro-economic indicators, Heads of State in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) have just suspended the application of convergence criteria, given the likely damage from this unexpected blow from the pandemic. For all African states and elsewhere across the world, economic models will need to be re-run to take into account the fall in GDP. So far as I can see, Togo has no choice but to revise its national plan in two respects: first by reallocating resources between the three priorities to give greater attention to social dimensions, and second to work through the consequences of this fall in GDP resulting from the global economic recession and its impact on the nation's economy.

As a specialist in monetary questions, how do you think the pandemic will affect monetary

policy, and a range of short and long term options for monetary and fiscal reforms related to the CFA Franc?

Let's start by recognising that the Central Bank for West African States (BCEAO) has injected some 800 billion FCFA (equivalent to US\$1.45b) into our economic area, which breaks significantly with traditional doctrine which had followed a strongly monetarist line, shaped by a desire to avoid inflation. I salute the BCEAO's decision to align its policy with those of central banks across the world which have been pursuing a range of unconventional monetary measures. I am convinced that this crisis constitutes a "*ruse de la raison*" (in the Hegelian sense)^[1], so that African financial and monetary institutions understand that we should no longer try and follow dogmas designed for western economies, but adapt the tools we have to hand for our own purposes and contexts. Over the last 15 years, I have been one of a group of people arguing for a much more engaged and ambitious policy to be played by our central banks and national development banks, given the range of challenges we face as countries. We've needed to experience this crisis which, while not hitting us too hard on the health front, has brought home the urgent need to update and re-think the role played by our banks. We must better understand and map out the channels by which monetary and financial measures feed through into the real economy. The next step will be to orient the actions of our monetary and financial system to support funding of African industrial champions. Many of our entrepreneurs do not get sufficient access to credit and, even when they do, the interest rates are prohibitive – in double figures! African financial systems and institutions need to provide the capital needed by our continent so we can develop effective value chains, particularly in the agro-industrial field. Let me give you the example of peri-urban farming – a truly local form of farming, which has been a lifesaver during the lockdown, because the very short supply chains involved have enabled food to be grown locally, which has replaced food imports which have been blocked by the closing of national boundaries. Peri-urban agriculture never gets properly funded because bankers fear the risks involved, and think they cannot get sufficient guarantees in case of failure. We have to identify what form of assets would be acceptable to investors in exchange

for funding peri-urban farming enterprise and the associated value chains for food and cash crops – coffee, cocoa, cotton - which could offer employment. It has always astonished me that we only process 3% of the cotton we grow in West Africa. I think the monetary and financial systems have a big part to play in making liquidity available which will ensure we get over the crisis, without too many bankruptcies – recognising that there is a clear difference between a liquidity crisis and a solvency crisis. Most of all what a central bank needs to do in a crisis is ensure sufficient liquidity. Take the division of responsibilities in the Euro zone; governments are taking solvency in hand while the central bank ensures sufficient liquidity. But given the very tight budgetary margins our governments operate under, it is not impossible to ask our central banks to go beyond the liquidity crisis and manage the solvency crisis as well, so that there are not too many enterprises that have to shut down.

On the question of the CFA Franc, where are we now? Does the economic context shaped by the pandemic have an impact on the reform agenda?

Let me say there are two important dimensions to this question, the first of a symbolic or political form which relates to the name given to the money, and the second which concerns the role of the currency within the wider region. Taking the first dimension, foremost for a currency is its function as a unit of account. As I have frequently noted, the name you give to your currency relates to your identity and it is not by chance that the Japanese don't count in Euro, nor do the Americans count in Yen. The CFA Franc refers back very clearly to the French colonies of West Africa, so choosing a new name has to be a very good thing. As a result, I have welcomed the decision taken December 21st 2019 in Abidjan, by the French and Ivorian Presidents to change the name of the CFA Franc. How might we change the name of the CFA Franc? When the Heads of State announced they would call it the ECO, I reminded them straight away that ECO is the name of the regional monetary system which ECOWAS has been discussing, and that there are already criteria established for joining the ECO. If you say that the ECO is going to take the place of the CFA Franc, that creates a real difficulty of acceptance for those ECOWAS members which are not already in the UEMOA

zone. From a pragmatic point of view, could we not find another name for the currency which could subsequently be integrated into the future ECO zone, or would this entail too many costs (collection of old notes, reissue of new notes, protection from fraud, etc.)? We would have to undertake this issue of a new currency twice in a short space of time were we to follow this route and start by moving away from the CFA Franc but using a name different from the ECO (such as Koris, Wari, etc...). Such a rapid shift from one money to a second and then a third might dispel the confidence which you need amongst the public, and which constitutes the gauge of success for any new monetary system.

The fundamental question today concerns the more strictly economic role of the money: how might we bring about a successful transfer from the CFA Franc to the ECO, and ensure the ECO zone works optimally? On the one hand, let's take the reform of the Franc zone in both West (UEMOA) and Central (CEMAC) Africa which is itself the subject of huge complexity on which I have worked for the last 15 years. And on the other, there is the proposed adoption of a common monetary system for ECOWAS, which itself poses questions about optimal monetary policy design in a region where the economic cycles of member states are not synchronised. In sum, for me there are three big challenges:

- i. Doing away with the colonial and post-colonial symbolism of the acronym CFA.
- ii. Creating a money for the ECOWAS region which wishes to pursue closer integration and needs to consider the desired level of collective solidarity, such as a federal budget, and how much shared policymaking they will agree to, given that some level of this coordination is indispensable for any monetary union.
- iii. Choosing the right level at which to exchange the national currency for this new regional money, a question which is not limited to a situation of monetary union. Ghana will ask itself the question – what should be the rate at which we exchange the cedi for this new money, as will Nigeria relative to the naira. We need answers to this question which align with the economic objectives we are seeking.

Given these three overall challenges, there are at least four possible scenarios to consider:

The first concerns the ECO-CFA with a fixed exchange rate with the Euro, and the progressive addition of ECOWAS states to the UEMOA grouping (such as Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, etc.). This is the most accepted scenario at present, given that it's the UEMOA member states which respect most of the criteria for convergence established for adherence to the ECO.

The second scenario could be one in which rather than converging towards the UEMOA states, there is a movement towards the ECOWAS member states which have the closest convergence in terms of GDP/head. Taking this scenario and criterion, the three model countries are Cape Verde, Nigeria and Ghana, rather than the francophone countries.

The third scenario offers the option of "monetary co-habitation" within the ECOWAS region, with UEMOA states taking on the ECO-CFA while an ECO-Naira comes under the aegis of Nigeria, for which the frontier would be the actual West African Monetary Zone (ZMAO). This is in fact the second monetary zone of West Africa which since 2002 had proposed to establish its own monetary system with the name of.... the ECO!

The fourth scenario would involve a monetary duality at the heart of ECOWAS, with the ECO as the common money but this running alongside each country's current currency, which would be retained at a level which was brought into line with the ECO which alone could be used for transactions with the rest of the world. This dual system is what Chile knew with its peso and the Unidad de Fomento. The European Monetary system also had in the past a payments scheme, even before the Treaty of Rome in 1957, and later with the ECU which constituted a unit of account though not a form of money which could be used for ordinary transactions. Such a scheme had already been thought up by the Senegalese economist Daniel Cabou in 1960, which he termed the "African Payments Union", then taken up by the Egyptian economist Samir Amin in 1969 as requested by Nigerien President Hamani Diori.

As becomes clear, the decisions being made right now should not be thought of as an end in themselves, but as the beginning of an era during which economists, politicians, philosophers, African historians and geographers, and Africanists more generally,

could help decision-makers put into place what I call "systems for shared prosperity". This is the task around which I want to organise in the next few months a colloquium at the University of Lomé titled "Which money for what kind of development in West Africa?"

With my last question, I'd like to hear your analysis of future relations between the EU and Africa, notably in the run-up to the next summit in late October.

The EU seems not to know how best to act in relation to Africa, with the big international shake-up in ideas caused by COVID, and that the EU paradoxically demonstrates herself with the massive recovery plan announced with 750 billion Euros pledged and the embryonic federal budget. We've clearly come to the end of unbridled neo-liberalism and we're seeing a return to more nationalistic approaches to trade and globalisation. Governments and regional groupings have been in the front line during the pandemic, and it's become clear that the approach to regulation which we've witnessed for the last 50 years has run its course, where we produce a good in one part of the world and export it to the other side of the planet, given the need to limit carbon emissions. This way of doing business cannot work anymore, and today it is clear that global value chains can no longer be chains of dependence for Africa. Given the huge gap in agricultural productivity between Africa and EU, of 1 to 400, how can it be right that Europe demands that Africa opens her market to European goods and services? We have to leave free trade behind and shift to fair trade. If the EU wants a real partnership with Africa, I see three things they need to take to heart:

First, the re-establishment of economic sovereignty is unavoidable for Africa if the continent is to become a true economic partner: we have spoken about money, we could go on to look at budgets with all the work required to expand the fiscal space so we can properly fund our public policies and establish counter-cyclical economic policies;

Second, is the need to insert short-circuit development chains into African development models: there is no sense in growing chickens in France to export to Senegal, or bringing powdered milk from the Netherlands to Togo. Instead, we must encourage local production of chickens and milk, which both generates local

employment and also reduces the carbon footprint associated with the distribution of these products;

The third challenge concerns our need to process and transform our raw materials here, thereby creating value, knowledge and skills, inclusive growth and jobs. This third challenge is at the heart of my book *“L’urgence Africaine: Changeons le modèle de croissance”* and as a result I won’t go into this point in greater detail here and now.

To finish off, I would say that the philosophy of a sincere partnership should involve the strengthening of capacities within Africa in order to address the three issues outlined above. Rather than the demand by Europe that Africa should open up her markets, because international competition is such that in current circumstances Europe sees Africa as a captive continent. The EU should not underestimate the strong demand for emancipation, for freedom by African youth, and this is one of the reasons behind the slow progress made by the Economic Partnership Agreements being concluded to follow the Cotonou agreement of 2000. It has been 20 years that we’ve not been able to go beyond the Lomé Convention of EU/ACP countries, despite the effort invested by those on both sides, because there are a number of fundamental difficulties. These include the non-execution clause which allows for unilateral action by the EU to suspend cooperation with an ACP state. There is also a problem associated with how ACP states which are not LDCs are treated, that’s to say those with intermediate income status. So overall, there are two important aspects – a general push for the emergence of a new inclusive development model, which takes account of ecological factors, and an ongoing learning process whereby the African continent is no longer considered Europe’s exclusive domain, or hunting ground.

If this is the starting point, then everything is negotiable between Africa and the EU. The rational basis for my views above makes even more sense, given the anxiety towards a wave of African migrants expressed in the works of a number of European researchers. The best means to reduce the risks of such a migratory peril, which is largely fantasy (take a look at the work of François Heran who demonstrates the exaggerated nature of the migration statistics), would be for Africa to become

economically stronger, so that those seeking to make their way to Europe do so as a life-choice, rather than for reasons of daily survival. I would plead for an African demography chosen by Africans, because you cannot tell everyone to stay home and equally constrain them to be under-populated. It doesn’t make any sense and is difficult to justify if you keep in mind one of the fundamental principles of international relations, that of people’s right to self-determination. I have a deep conviction that Europe and Africa, due to their geographic proximity, and close cultural ties, could build together a shared future on the basis of both sides winning from this. In particular, Europe could be the sound box for Africa’s voice to resonate loudly in the global grouping of nations, with Europe next to Africa and for Africa. To do this, it needs a real shared development path, and we need absolutely to avoid the temptation of perpetuating a hegemony founded on pillage and the institutionalisation of historically asymmetric relations.

Note:

[i] Hegel believed that reason governs the world and that we are evolving towards a more rational, moral and free state.

Carlos Lopes, University of Cape Town: “The COVID-19 crisis presents major opportunities for Africa’s structural transformation” January 2021.

Professor Lopes has led several United Nations institutions, including the [United Nations Institute for Training and Research](#), [UN System Staff College](#), and the United Nations [Economic Commission for Africa](#) (UNECA). He is



currently the [African Union High Representative for Partnerships with Europe](#) and a member of the [African Union Reform Team](#) led by President Paul Kagame. His latest books include *Structural Change in Africa (with George Kararach, Routledge, 2020)* and *Africa in*

Transformation (Palgrave MacMillan, 2019).

You've recently completed for INET a really interesting, in-depth paper with Dirk te Velde of ODI outlining Africa's industrialisation to date, and options for the future, which we hope to make available very shortly. There are many striking points made in this rich and detailed paper, such as the need for a targeted industrialisation policy rather than hoping general investment climate measures will do. You talk about the need for coordinating public and private actors around a shared goal of economic transformation as a national project, and you dispatch traditional comparative advantage in favour of a more dynamic concept, arguing for a pragmatic approach. Does this mean that economic theory doesn't matter anymore, or is there an emerging body of new thinking which now helps point the way?

The lesson of which we are all aware but tend to forget is that each wave of industrialization around the world and over time has been very specific, both in terms of the political economy and a certain number of characteristics which have influenced the mega-trends. If we go through the historical waves of industrialization, we recognize certain commonalities but also quite different strands which have to do with the context. For African countries it will be the same. As late comers to accelerated industrialization, while its very important to learn from previous waves, we must also recognize that the context internationally is very different now. The characteristics which were very positive and congenial in the case of south-east Asia in the 1990s, which was the most recent wave, will not apply to the African context today. We can learn a bit from it and adapt to changed circumstances. In doing so, economic theory will still be relevant, but we'll have to consider the body of knowledge which points in the direction of innovation. Value chains have become extremely complex, making the windows of opportunity narrower than before. Africa needs to create a bubble of protectionism which does not affront international trade regimes but still creates a bit of an opportunity. At the same time, as you insert yourself within more globalized value chains, you must embrace certain characteristics of technological development, albeit not all of them at once. Pursuing such a trajectory requires a certain level of

sophistication. Unfortunately, most African countries do not possess these prerequisites. There is a need to understand the political realm to gauge how politics influences choices and enables the creation of such space. This is why one needs to move from generic statements about industrial policy to more specific and granular policies, which are going to make a difference in a given country. That's the lesson we derive from the body of literature available and the experiments of the last two decades.

If you were to look for examples of successful coordination between political and economic actors, on the continent today, where would you see that combination of forces behind a common agenda coming through most positively?

We see it in countries which are capable of leapfrogging. If I had the time and competence, I would love to put together a "leapfrogging capability index", which would bring together a certain number of characteristics intrinsic to allowing countries to leapfrog in terms of industrial policy. I recognize that a lot of countries which try to leapfrog have failed because they imitate without sophistication. Free Trade Areas (FTAs) can be helpful but FTAs are a rather crude form of protectionism. If you think it's only about putting infrastructure into Special Economic Zones to make them attractive, then you will fail. There are plenty of half-baked industrial policy attempts which don't seize the full spectrum of issues necessary for success. We are looking here for leaders and leadership styles which are reformist and transformative. In my own typology, I divide African regimes in two categories: rent-seekers and transformers. It's not necessary to create very complex governance index types because at the end of the day what really makes a difference in terms of economic transformation is whether you're trapped by rent-seeking characteristics, or not. Africa has been marked by so much rent-seeking behaviour, thanks to commodity dependence and the fact that commodities occupy most of the economic policy attention. It is hard for African countries to move out of that box. Even those countries which are not well-endowed tend to replace rent-seeking behaviour from commodities with an attitude towards dealing with Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) as if it were rent. Some leaders use ODA the same way others use

commodities. They don't do enough to transform their social fabric and economic production systems because they just depend on these externalities, whether from commodity exports or from ODA.

How do we make sure leaders are capable of really transforming their countries? It requires a certain skill. This skill needs to combine with a certain knowledge of global technological developments which will influence the composition of industrial production. The costs of production are migrating heavily towards the softer side of production systems, be it intellectual property or branding and design, and less and less about the production of the physical goods themselves. If you don't embrace all these developments, including automation and robotization, you won't be able to transform. These are some of the ingredients of leapfrogging capability. Some countries possess it more than others. Ethiopia has done very well on that score, as have Rwanda, Morocco and Mauritius. Lately there has been positive developments taking place in Egypt. If you take the broader industrialization space, not just manufacturing, you should include countries like Togo and Djibouti who are transforming based on sub-regional logistical needs for supply chains, because their location offers opportunities to integrate industrial development from other vantage points than manufacturing alone. Africa now has a critical mass of leaders capable of understanding such challenges.

Let's turn to the pandemic and the current context. A good number of analysts we have interviewed agree this pandemic provides a valuable opportunity for African leaders and governments to rethink their development models, accelerate regional integration, diversify the economy, and pursue greener growth. Do you also think we're at a turning point for the continent? What type of economic thinking should drive reform or change?

Any major crisis like the one we're facing today normally presents opportunities. Transitioning is very difficult during a crisis because you must deal with disruption, then regroup and try to take advantage of what is possible, to reinforce or accelerate change. There is no difference with Covid-19 in this regard. In the paper I wrote with Dirk, we list several developments which are quite positive as a result of the COVID crisis. One of them is the

realization by Africans that when push comes to shove, they must protect their internal market because the alternative will be limited access to supplies. That has been a powerful message when it comes to protective clothing, medical equipment and ventilators. In so far as vaccines are concerned, most realize the need to reach for new regional instruments, some of which have emerged during the crisis. Joint procurement has been a phenomenal example. But the 2020 crisis has not been limited to medical concerns. The socio-economic dimensions of the crisis are probably even more devastating. But less mentioned is the fact that 2020 was also a challenging year in terms of environmental distress. Two waves of locust invasion in the Horn of Africa, a fourth year of drought in parts of Southern Africa, floods in countries which never had such experience before, repeat floods in a single year such as in Mozambique, and major environmental stress in the Sahel, which is partly responsible for the prevailing conflicts, all point in one direction. Africa is being beaten up by climate change. The pandemic has resulted from viruses becoming more recurrent and mutations speedier as humans encroach on wild spaces. Health and the environment are closely connected. A full recovery from the pandemic requires attention to the entire planet. We must go in that direction. Africans are already paying a high price for climate change. They are by far the most affected by it. The average temperature cap of 1.5°C approved by the Paris Agreement (and let's not forget about a global average which Africa surpassed some time back) has been left behind. Africans should take advantage of this crisis and promote aggressively their own energy transition – this is the shift that matters the most. With the crashing of fossil fuel prices, renewables have become even more competitive, as well as being faster to install and more labour-intensive, which is good for job creation. There is no reason whatsoever to postpone a move towards a low carbon-based industrialization. But little FDI is invested in Africa's energy transition, and policy commitments are not translated into effective engagements. Key players want to preserve their comparative advantage in this field and minimise the transfer of these technologies to countries they consider economically immature. It is easier to rollout such technologies in areas of the globe

where the innovation ecosystem is more supportive and the financial landscape more favourable.

But now, suddenly, everyone seems to be talking about green deals. It has become fashionable. Africans should take advantage of the new grown interest to tap into financing opportunities which were not available even one year ago. There are interesting possibilities for energy transitions. Another opportunity arising is the option of investing in building infrastructure with more sustainable materials. Infrastructure was already important but thanks to the post-COVID response most countries realize logistics are strategic and need to be rethought, as they have been significantly disrupted by the pandemic. The notion of risk has changed, and there is a shift from assessing risk in terms of “low probability-low risk” towards “low probability-high risk”. A lot of it has to do with reducing dependence on one sub-region like China, which implies moving towards a greater geographical spread as part of reducing risk globally. The implication will be the spreading of logistical hubs. New opportunities will open up for Africa, due to its geographical closeness to some of the big consumer markets. Labour-intensive industrial production will have to find new geographies to establish itself, allowing Africa to seize these new opportunities. In fact, the windows of opportunity I mentioned are not automatic, they are not a given. But they do offer incredible pathways which were not available one year ago. Pharma is one very important field in which African countries have been extremely interested. Can we use this crisis to enter negotiations with big pharma for local production? The high consumption of medicines and vaccines in Africa should be a good business case for such a move. We consume 47% of the vaccines produced in the world. Africa certainly has a disease pattern which has been underserved by the pharma industry. The growing consumer class in Africa translates into increases in disposable income. The obvious business logic is to do what is now finally being considered and acknowledge Africa’s real potential.

You’ve written a lot recently on the need to reset relations between Africa and Europe and abandon the unbalanced and piecemeal approaches of the past. There seems to be a lot

of tension between the two continents at the moment, with the October Africa-Europe summit postponed and the cancellation of the mini summit planned for early December. Can you outline some of the specific difficulties which lie behind the desire for a reset in relations – is it trade, investment, the Common Agricultural Policy? What would need to change for you to sense that this reset which the EC President has talked about was more than just words?

We have lots of expressions of good will from Europe towards Africa, lots of announcements of different programmes and initiatives, and pronouncements acknowledging that Africa has become very strategic for Europe. When you look at the mega trends – whether demographics, climate change or technology - it is clear that Africa is a must for Europe to get right. We listen to all of this. But in terms of the institutional arrangements not much has changed. Yet Africa has been insisting on such change, we’ve been quite clear about what we expect. We have called for a new approach consistent with the array of documents signed by both sides, which speak of a “paradigm shift” in the relationship. What would a paradigm shift entail? From an African perspective four priorities stand out - trade, migration, peace and security, and climate change - to be negotiated on a continent-to-continent basis. They sound pretty obvious but if the shift doesn’t happen, there are reasons. What are the difficulties? The proliferation of different mechanisms out there seems difficult for Europe to let go. One example: trying to negotiate with the continent of Africa through the African, Caribbean and Pacific group doesn’t make any sense. The ACP group only represents part of Africa, and that particular relationship set up decades ago was based on the prominence of development aid, not on framing strategically the four priorities I mentioned earlier. For instance, on trade, the European Union has been insisting on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) as the basis for engaging with the continent. We are busy establishing the African Continental FTA for which the EU has expressed support. However, such support should not impose the controversial EPAs as the basis for a continent-to-continent new trade arrangement. That would not qualify as a paradigm shift. The EPAs slice Africa up and undermine regional integration. It is a mechanism that has been on the table for two decades of negotiation

without being ratified for most sub-regions after all this time. Another example: there are currently three configurations for discussing migration between Europe and Africa. We want one single framework. The systemic atomization of Africa through different mechanisms is not in line with the forward-looking pronouncements on the strategic dimensions of the Africa-Europe continental partnership. Europe must let go of different institutional arrangements which do not correspond to such a strategic vision. Yet, despite some degree of misunderstanding I am still hopeful there will be progress. Certainly, there are voices in Europe in favour of such a change.

And do the EU and Africa have a joint destiny that establishes a third way between the rather more hostile camps of the US and China? Is this a preferred partnership relative to others?

For Africa, getting its partnership with Europe well-defined is going to be a key marker to shape Africa's partnerships with other parts of the world. Europe is our number one trading partner, the number one in terms of investment stock, and number one ODA provider. But what is worrisome is that in these three areas its status and position are eroding year after year. Africa wants more not less. For Africa, the issue shouldn't be whether Europe loses its primacy. Europe has to rise to the challenge and recognize a new Africa, a future Africa. Europe can start by adding to its usual narrative that it is the continent's first trading partner with recognition that Africa is also Europe's no.3 trading partner – it is more important than Japan in trading volume, and it is more important than the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean combined, or three times the size of trade with India. Europe has more trade with Egypt than Canada. There is a need to recognize Africa's importance and not just talk about Africa as a recipient of development aid, a continent you need to help. ODA should not minimize Africa's agency and importance.

Let's talk about Africa's relations with China, which is the single most important bilateral trade partner and creditor as well. Currently, several African countries are in debt-distress and need to renegotiate with China and other creditors. Despite China providing much-needed funding for infrastructure projects amongst others, the relationship is still very

asymmetrical. How might African governments better organize their partnership with China? Is there the need for a more coherent and strategic approach, driven via the AU or another African institution?

What is said about Europe applies to China as well! There is an atomization of relations with China too. China prefers the bilateral route for all engagements with Africa and rather sees the AU as some sort of depository of special initiatives that do not fit the bilateral engagements. It treats, so far, the regional undertakings as an add-on rather than being part of a common framework. The jury is out about how China will relate to the African Continental FTA. In principle, China has expressed support. However, for the moment the China-AU dialogues on continent-wide flagship projects are superficial, with the notable exception of the Africa Center for Disease Control (which has been extremely active on the current pandemic). The AU had put strong emphasis on the establishment of high-speed trains in Africa with Chinese support and building major cross-border infrastructure to service several different countries, such as ports and airports. So far nothing has happened. The AU is also trying to incentivize China to create opportunities for "Made in Africa" products to be exported to the huge Chinese consumer market. It is critical to remember that all of the above initiatives were accepted by China's President Xi Jinping, who promised at the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to move in such directions. So far nothing essential has materialized. This being said, Africans like the fact that the Chinese have placed themselves between two levels of financial engagement with the continent. While concessional funding is not drying up - in fact in terms of volume it has attained an all-time high, the economies of the continent in PPP terms have doubled in size, making currently available concessional funding short of the magnitude it had in the 1990s. In other words, the increases don't match in percentage terms in 2020 what was available to fund capital investment 20-30 years ago. To access commercial sovereign lending African countries pay some of the world's highest risk premiums, thanks to the punishing assessments of the rating agencies. Chinese lenders have positioned themselves in the middle, between very low interest concessional rates and very high interest commercial

lending. Other lenders are following suit, such as Turkey, UAE, Malaysia and India. African countries go for the Chinese-type option because you wouldn't find that financial availability easily, making China by far the largest creditor to the continent with almost a quarter of all contracted debt. Obviously African countries would love to have some competition amongst lenders. What is wrong with the current situation? First, China's market position doesn't cost it much, it can be done on the cheap. Credit to Africa is only 4% of their outward FDI. It is very little for China, even though it is a lot for Africa. Second, another worrisome trend with most Chinese lenders is that their funding, while not classified as tied aid, works the same way. Lending is filtered through their private sector or major corporations to create market opportunities for them, rather than being transformative for Africa. This is particularly true for infrastructure. Chinese companies are very present in the area of infrastructure, exporting their overcapacity to Africa. China's need for infrastructure in its domestic market has diminished considerably. Their priority seems to be exporting what is no longer required in China, which is often more polluting forms of infrastructure, less respectful of newly adopted low carbon priorities. The much talked about train projects in Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria built by Chinese companies are not using low carbon technology, such as the ones being rolled out in China today. Africa seems to be getting technological solutions China doesn't prioritise any longer. This is problematic. Third, China has been clobbered so hard by western public opinion for its so-called softer approach to Africa that they have become wary of their image and reputational risk. The paradox is that such a development makes it more difficult for Africa to access Chinese lending. Despite COVID creating greater need for Chinese capital, the opposite is occurring.

Is it not the responsibility of African governments to come up with better negotiation skills and requirements for these projects? From a more granular perspective, don't you find some governments are better than others at getting a good deal from China?

Definitely! It is partly about negotiating better with China. And negotiating skills are difficult to come by. For example, you can tap into the

special facility of the African Development Bank to access excellent legal advice; or contract specialist consultants to help evaluate the real costs of infrastructure projects. The bottom line is that Africans are between a rock and a hard place. A typical African government negotiator will have to face dilemmas such as wanting to privilege low carbon options, including clean energy, while being eager to access capital, that may not be available for their specific priorities. Trade-offs are tough to manoeuvre. Skilled leaders happen to be the smarter negotiators, a competence the majority don't possess.

There's been a very harsh impact of COVID-19 on Africa with a fall in GDP and squeeze on fiscal space. You talk about this asymmetry in the cost of capital for African governments with rich nations being able to borrow at pretty much zero rates, whereas African nations have to pay a much higher rate of interest. There are various things you can do about this, such as changing risk perceptions. But are there also untapped domestic resources which could better be mobilized?

No doubt. Our fiscal pressure is too low. Take Nigeria, where the fiscal pressure is between 6 and 7%. It is a scandal that it is so low (the world average is 35%). High dependence on oil exports to generate public revenue automatically distracts economic policy from the potential sources of revenue in the rest of the economy. Most African countries' taxes are basically exported, the fiscal pressure is so low that it transforms the otherwise due payment of taxes into illicit flows. Add to this calamity the exaggerated subsidies (for instance, for fossil fuels) and tax exemptions. These are, nevertheless, only the tip of the iceberg – by far the most important losses come from illicit flows. Tax reform and tax policy are crucial for economic transformation. Countries performing well, and I have mentioned some, are all tackling this issue and increasing their fiscal pressure. Countries need to establish a path towards increasing their fiscal revenues. It doesn't happen suddenly. It requires competence. Increases of 1-2% every few years becomes quite phenomenal over time. It creates policy space which was not there before. And more fiscal space means more policy space. Domestic resource mobilization in Africa should also focus on the accumulated capital in African pension funds, close to

US\$1trillion. With rare exceptions most pension funds are not productively used – becoming a complete waste of opportunities. Countries like Namibia or Algeria could afford to fund their transformative requirements with just the capital from their pension funds. How can we get this discussion going rather than talk about ODA all the time? I don't want to minimize some systemic problems that are stopping Africa accessing capital at reasonable cost. The latest exhibit which shows the size of problem is demonstrated by the pandemic response. The stimulus packages being put together by major economies are distorting the financial market, augmenting the risk premium for emerging and frontier markets in a disproportionate way, given the latter's limited ability to emulate such colossal liquidity packages. These systemic problems should not be underestimated. The IMF is putting its finger on some of the impacts. They acknowledge sovereign public debt is no longer a problem of any one specific region, it's a worldwide crisis that calls for a different approach. The IMF should consider regulatory measures to push back the rating agencies while revisiting the criteria to evaluate debt-sustainability.

The pandemic has demonstrated that multilateralism is key to address global challenges, but we've also seen some countries prefer bilateralism and atomization. What will be the future of multilateralism after COVID?

It will have to be redrawn. The Doha round at the WTO has been under negotiation for close on two decades. One of the bones of contention is TRIPS. Current intellectual property regimes are skewed, which explain protectionist attitudes when it comes to trade in highly competitive areas. This pandemic has demonstrated such behaviour in relation to pharma. Despite the talk about a 'people's vaccine' this is unlikely to change. Anyone who thinks COVID is going to solve this – good luck! The new normal may actually dictate more exclusionary rather than integrated trade policies. And that is precisely why the Doha Round was important; it was about not treating trade as an end in itself but rather a means towards an end. That end can only be development. But the prevailing dynamics are not yet ready for such a needed shift, even though they have been made more urgent by the pressing demands for a climate transition.

The trade dilemmas are, somehow, less prominent than the crisis in the current financial systems. Agreements reached at G20 meetings have been underwhelming. Let's remember when we were just out of the Great Depression we got the Bretton Woods institutions, and when we were just out of the financial crisis of 2007-8 we got the G20 established. This crisis is much deeper than those two previous examples. What is the right response supposed to be? Use the same tools as before? Crises such as the one we are living through usually create new tools and institutions.

Before wrapping up, you've spoken about launching a green transformation in Africa. What do you say to countries like Senegal, Kenya and others who have newly discovered oil and gas deposits? What is a reasonable strategy for them? Should they leave it all in the ground? Is there a ten-year window to get something in terms of revenue from this resource? What would you do if you were leading a country which had discovered this seemingly valuable resource?

Honestly, if you find a spectacular reserve of fossil fuels, you need to think carefully about whether it is worth prioritizing such an investment in relation to other options. I don't think the prices of fossil fuels are going to convincingly recover. The fossil fuel market is now marked much more by stocks rather than flows. During 2020 we saw it vividly. Therefore, unless a country has the capacity to transform its fossil fuels to reach domestic and neighbouring markets, it has only short-lived potential. It is not going to be a good bet for the future. If a country like Angola refined all its oil, its market would be neighbouring countries, instead of the US and China that only wants its crude. The prices for refined oil products will certainly diminish over time, but with much less volatility. But exporting crude oil? It is an insane choice. I was a member of the Global Commission on the Geostrategy of Energy Transition, promoted by IRENA. Our main conclusion was that a growing deployment of renewables has set in motion a global energy transformation with significant implications for geopolitics. Renewables differ in many respects from fossil fuels, and these differences will have geostrategic implications. You can see the US abandoning the Middle East because its geostrategic interest linked to oil

supplies from that region is gone. The US does not need that oil anymore. The same trends are influencing other geographies. The quicker a country can move into renewables and clean energy, the better for the country. I realize that for a country like Mozambique, where recent gas discoveries are as large as Qatar's reserves and the economic base is so low, it is very enticing to believe this is a bounty for the country's future. Indeed, Mozambique may need such a vital economic anchor. Gas can be perceived as a transitional fuel between more polluting, high-carbon coal and oil and less polluting energy sources. Maybe such a window can stay open for about 20 years. The country is promoting investments in the sector at great speed. But the moment it discovered these riches, a jihadist terrorist insurgency emerged almost overnight. I don't like the idea that when you're rich in natural resources, it is always a curse. This calls for a strategic view and calm decision-making. The curse is often the politics, from the way you handle this great natural resource wealth.

Edward Brown, ACET Ghana: "Growth with 'Depth' should guide economic transformation in Africa" October 2020.

In this interview, Folashadé Soulé and Camilla Toulmin discuss with Edward K. Brown, Senior Director, Research and Advisory services at the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET) based in Accra, Ghana, the effects of COVID-19 on regional integration and economic transformation in Africa, and the role of ACET and African think tanks in advising how African governments respond to the crisis.



Given your location in Accra, how do you assess the performance of the government's health and economic response to the COVID-19 crisis?

The Ghanaian government was very quick in reacting to the pandemic, and by the end of March, lockdown was in force. In the beginning, there was widespread compliance, and the government spent time informing and

educating the population about what was happening. It showed strong commitment, and the crisis brought together the various political factions behind a common cause. As elections are planned for December this year, the tension between saving lives and saving livelihoods then began to emerge. Obviously, like all developing countries, the health infrastructure is weak. And the economy is highly informal, with more than 80% of the working population employed in this sector. It was extremely difficult to impose quarantine on marketplaces, and although there was some fumigation done, they had to stay open. Social gatherings, weddings, and funerals were prohibited, but there has been a lot of pressure for government to relax these measures.

Also, the government wanted to get on with its political campaign. I hear the government has stopped testing. There are no new cases being detected, and the number of active cases is falling, either through death or recovery. Is this due to lack of testing or because the case numbers are actually falling? There seems to be an emerging consensus that the epidemic in Africa has not panned out the way the international community thought it would. It has not been as virulent and pervasive as initially feared. Various explanations have been offered – Africa has a youthful population, so they are less likely to die and therefore the impact has been limited. Also, maybe because African countries have endured endemic diseases for so long, they have developed strong immunities, whether to Ebola, malaria or other communicable diseases. Whatever the evidence, it is all pointing to the level of infection being much lower in Africa than elsewhere. The death rate per million, even in South Africa, although higher than elsewhere in Africa, is still much lower than in Europe and the US.

Governments have tried relief packages to mitigate both health and economic effects. The Ghanaian government raised over 600m cedis (around US\$100m) to be offered as soft loans. They came up with a comprehensive programme to resuscitate the economy, in part by boosting the "One district - one factory" policy and offering funds for SMEs. But there are many questions to ask: Was this effective? Did it save jobs? Has it just boosted consumption, or has it been productivity-enhancing? The jury is still out on this issue. I

don't yet have the data so we cannot say what the overall impact has been. It's too early to say. Social distancing and face masks continue, but in a more relaxed manner. Until recently, you could not go into any public area, or even drive a car, without wearing a mask. It is now more relaxed and does not seem to be manifesting in higher death rates or increased numbers in intensive care. The airport has reopened; they have a testing site there so anybody coming into town is tested. If you can't show a recent negative test, you are quickly tested, so you're not quarantined. And the terrestrial borders are also open again. We need coordination amongst countries. Closing the border doesn't solve the problem; we need common policy and regulations across the different countries in West Africa. This would help transboundary mitigation. Rather than looking at national programs, we need a regional or continental approach.

In that regard, the African Union's Centre for Disease Control (CDC) has done really good work, coordinating closely with the WHO and each individual country's health system. This may be partly responsible for the lower levels of incidence we can see. I am sure we will see a lot of analytical work explaining these differences in performance; scientists and analysts will look at the lower incidence in Africa vs. elsewhere. There may be a second wave as we go into cooler months – we're in our winter right now. But generally, for a country like Ghana, with a largely uniform temperature all the year round, while there maybe be cooler weather right now, there is no evidence that the incidence is rising; people are going about their work as usual. The only thing there might be some hesitation about regards churches and social gatherings. People are going for shorter hours, with fewer people, but otherwise they're getting back to normal. Funerals are very important, but there has been no surge in the number of funerals, and no one is hiding to bury their dead, so we can be confident of the death figures.

It seems that far from being the victim, Africa has shown many other parts of the world a strong and effective response we can all learn from. The reaction from the international community betrays an unhelpful attitude. Africa's performance in the face of COVID-19 has brought a useful reversal of roles.

It is still puzzling. In some countries you can

argue that the leadership has been reckless, such as Tanzania and Burundi. In the case of Burundi, the leadership paid for that. It is also reflective of the fact that countries have been constantly struggling to fight infectious diseases. When Ebola came, it was a traumatic experience, but they also developed mitigation measures that probably helped with COVID-19. Do we know the true number of cases? No, and many people are probably asymptomatic. We do need more robust data for better analysis. What lessons can we draw? Social distancing is not easy in crowded traditional markets. It is not clear to me why we've had no big spikes with lockdown lifted. In practice, it's only in major cities Accra, Kumasi and to some extent, Takoradi that lockdown had some impact. In the north, it was much less apparent, and they were mainly untouched, with few cases. The highest incidences were in Accra and Kumasi. My friends who are nurses and doctors confirm case numbers are falling.

How does the pandemic affect the strategy for economic transformation? How should development models be re-thought for the future?

The pandemic has certainly led to a drop in economic growth. Pre-pandemic growth projections were 3.9% for Africa overall. With the pandemic, this has been revised significantly downwards for 2020; the numbers keep changing so I can't quote the exact number at this time. It important to note that this is the first serious recession Africa has experienced in more than 30 years, equivalent to a total loss of \$190 billion in gross domestic product for the continent. This translates into a loss of about 30 million jobs, plunging about 50 million Africans into extreme poverty. These projections, derived from World Bank sources are realistic, and imply a significant drop in aggregate demand as companies are operating at very low capacity.

African countries have been hit hard, including mineral-rich ones. How do we quickly recover? The theory has been: Quell the pandemic and restore growth by providing COVID-19 response measures. So far, the support has been nowhere near what developed countries can do domestically. What COVID-19 has done is to halt temporarily the transformation trajectory of most African countries. But African governments need to prevent this downward decline. The good news is that the

pathway to progress will be assured if our leaders step up the momentum for inclusive and sustainable growth by providing the enabling infrastructure: roads and energy, upgrading the skills of the labour force and support for SMEs. In short, they need to step up the momentum to transform their economies.

At ACET, we define “transformation” as “[growth with depth](#)”. Let me briefly elaborate. Growth itself is not sufficient to transform economies; we need growth propelled by certain key actions. DEPTH is the acronym for those actions. It means countries must **d**iversify to hedge against internal and external shocks. The pandemic is one big all-encompassing external shock. It has affected practically all aspects of our lives – an existential threat. From an economic standpoint, a more diversified economy will be more resilient and better in mitigating associated risks. Countries must be **e**xport competitive. This means benchmarking against the best, globally and regionally. The survival of any industry hinges on the extent to which the products are competitive on the global market. The other thing closely linked to transformation is **p**roductivity. You cannot create wealth if productivity on the farm, in manufacturing, and in services remains low. And, countries need to constantly innovate and apply **T**echnology; this is key to competitiveness and a hallmark of a transformed economy. Together, the four variables (diversification, export competitiveness, productivity increases and technological upgrading) will enhance **h**uman well-being. Yes, we need to reduce poverty, but if we don’t grow the economy, in ways that are sustainable and inclusive, we will be redistributing poverty and not creating an inclusive economy. If we want equitable and inclusive societies, in-depth economic transformation as I have defined is key.

One of our biggest challenges in Africa is how to accelerate the demographic transition. We’re not yet there. We have not yet been able to reap the demographic dividend, which will only come with increased education, particularly secondary and especially for women. Only then will we get a significant fall in the fertility rate, when women are actively participating in the labour force. This will add millions of dollars to GDP. We must focus on empowering and upskilling women to become

active partners in social and economic development. The next edition of ACET’s flagship report, the [African Transformation Report](#), is being finalized now. Its title is *Securing Africa’s Future*, and it will look closely at four interconnected issues critical for unleashing growth with DEPTH, including demographics. The others are innovation and technology, climate change, and regional integration.

Embracing digital innovations and technology will be key to Africa’s economic transformation. But as digitization substitutes for labour in some respects, it raises concerns about the bulging youth population – demographics – and exacerbates the challenges of job creation. Africa is the youngest continent, with about 25% of the world’s youth. We have to train the youth to reap the demographic dividend. This means stepping up the momentum to increase access to improved quality and relevant education.

The Mastercard Foundation recently released a major report, to which ACET contributed on this topic – “[Secondary Education and the Future of Work](#)”. Universal secondary education was one of the report’s main themes; it will be critical to driving economic transformation and developing a future ready workforce that can respond to labour demands anywhere in the world. Foundational skills and good grounding in STEM subjects, including critical thinking and problem-solving skills, are key to taking advantage of the rapidly evolving digital and technological innovations. However, we are far from getting there. The latest Human Capital Index from the World Bank placed most African countries at the very bottom. Less than 20% of secondary and university students are enrolled in STEM subjects. We must get the right skills. We need to significantly increase the budget, mobilize more domestic resources, and with creative financial engineering crowd in private capital to finance the public investments in infrastructure, such as schools, roads, electricity, digital connectivity and other infrastructure.

Could you tell us more about the ACET report, which is coming out, the time and details?

We’re just concluding the final round of reviews and putting the final touches on it. We expect to publish it by the end of the year or

early 2021. There are the two topics I've just talked about: the demographic dividend and what that means for jobs, especially among youth, and skills needs; and then also technology and innovation. Another topic in the *Africa Transformation Report (ATR)* is climate change – one of the quintessential challenges Africa faces. The downside risks are much higher in Africa than elsewhere, due to capacity and governance challenges. The upside is that climate mitigation measures in Africa could be very cost effective. Look at solar energy, which we have in abundance. But we need to make sure governments are catalytic, and not competing with the private sector. Smart agriculture could benefit from drip irrigation, the use of drones, etc.

The fourth factor the ATR will examine in-depth is regional cooperation and integration. Again, this will be in the context of what is needed to transform through growth with DEPTH. The AU's Agenda 2063 recognizes the importance of integrating to transform. When you look at Africa, we have so many small, fragmented economies, with small markets. Many of these countries can only transform if they integrate with their neighbours. This must be their strategic direction; it's not an either/or situation. We must come together to ensure effective economies of scale and coordination. This is where the recently ratified African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement is going to be very critical. The benefits will accrue to all countries.

The ATR puts the spotlight specifically on regional public goods, because they really matter for regional cooperation and for driving the economic transformation of African economies. Benefits of regional public goods accrue to all countries only if everyone contributes. Riparian issues, such as management of big river basins like the Nile, Congo, and Niger are obvious ones, where coordinated use of water, and control of pollution bring many benefits along the watershed. The benefits and challenges to integration are well defined in the forthcoming report. Stay tuned.

Europe and Africa were due to have a big summit, which has now been postponed till next year. It seems there were a number of outstanding areas of disagreement on both the EU and African side, and not enough common ground. What do you think were the main points

of difference?

My take is that many African countries were not keen on follow-up to the EU's economic partnership agreements. Countries like Nigeria didn't want to sign up and, given the AfCFTA, there is the feeling that the EU should align with the protocols of the AfCFTA rather than continuing with bilateral negotiations. AfCFTA has become the new framework for dialogue and negotiations. This will be one of the sticking points.

At ACET, we worked with the German research institute DIE and ECDPM to produce a [policy report](#), which just came out last week, on this topic. The paper identifies ways to move beyond the traditional cooperation niche and areas where Europe and the African Union could act together. Beyond trade issues, you see a decline in bilateral aid, and emphasis shifted to private sector development and crowding in private capital and investment into African economies. Can we use blended finance for crowding-in private investment? Regional integration needs regional infrastructure. Each country is enjoined to build that piece of the infrastructure that passes through its country, but priorities may differ and abilities to finance this also differ. So, you're not able to get a synchronized approach, due to this mismatch between physical infrastructure and the finance.

It is estimated that about \$80b financing is needed each year to bolster Africa's infrastructure. Landlocked countries like those in the Sahel face tremendous challenges. The cost of imported goods in landlocked capitals of Mali or Niger is sometimes twice or three times the price in coastal countries. Livestock is one of the main natural endowments of Sahelian countries, a great source for the meat, milk and leather industries, linked to regional supply and value chains, so these countries have real potential to transform their economies. Regional public goods include transport corridors, power pools, river basin management, digital connectivity, etc. For example, in the digital space, cross-border interoperability is very important to expand access and reduce cost to larger populations and expand regional markets for goods and services. Africa still has the highest cost of internet services in the whole world.

ACET is a renowned African think tank. What

role can ACET play as regards the resilience and recovery plan post-COVID-19, especially by networking with others?

The broader value proposition of ACET is to transform Africa within a generation. We are a pan-African institution operating in more than 20 countries, through partnerships and cooperation with similar institutions. We pride ourselves on offering African-led solutions to Africa's most pressing development issues. That's what we tried to do with regard to COVID-19. We have developed a [ten-point policy plan for Africa's recovery, growth and transformation](#). These are policy actions that governments could prioritize to speed up recovery and keep the transformation agenda on track at the same time. We summarize them in four areas. The first is enhancing resource mobilization and management, particularly domestic resources. The second is improving governance, including state effectiveness in delivery and transparency. The third is strengthening business and investment environments. And the fourth is supporting digital innovation and entrepreneurship.

As I said earlier, COVID-19 offered an opportunity for different and opposing political actors to come together to address an existential threat. Thus, the recommendations in our policy paper were to encourage governments to heighten attention to transformative policy reforms. In other words, don't let the crisis go to waste – seize the opportunity to get different factions and political groups working together, which otherwise might have been too difficult. And I should say these priorities have been fully endorsed by the World Bank and many of our research partners in their engagements with governments, as well.

Nimrod Zalk, Department of Trade and Industry, South Africa: "Let's be strategic in our thinking about trade" October 2021.

Nimrod Zalk is Industrial Development Advisor in the Office of the Director-General of the South African Department of Trade,



Industry and Competition (DTIC). He is also a non-executive director on the board of the South African Industrial Development Corporation. He chairs the steering committee of the Industrial Development Think Tank at the University of Johannesburg and is a Scientific Committee Member of the African Programme on Rethinking Development Economics (APORDE). Nimrod Zalk has been involved in a range of policy, research and academic processes related to African industrial development and trade, including development and implementation of South Africa's National Industrial Policy Framework and various Industrial Policy Action Plans.

What is your analysis of South Africa's government and civil society responses since the beginning of the COVID crisis? Please give us a broad assessment of progress so far.

Let me preface the discussion by speaking of the particularities of the South African economy. My own specialisation is as an economist focused on structural transformation and industrial policy. I am based at the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, and at the moment I am responsible for a small advisory unit under the Director-General. This involves running strategic research programmes, particularly the Industrial Development Think Tank we established at the University of Johannesburg, which looks at a wide variety of structural transformation issues not only in South Africa but in the wider Southern African region.

In my response to your question, you should remember I am not a medical scientist. We've experienced several ups and downs in responding to the COVID crisis. Initially every country around the world was floundering and figuring out how best to respond to the crisis. The initial response from a public health point of view was quite robust, by making sure there

were basic social distancing, handwashing and mask-wearing measures in place. Periodic lockdowns continue, depending on the prevailing severity of infection rates. There was some contestation around the severity of lock-down measures, though from a public health viewpoint, at certain times you need very strong action. There was pushback from some people who said lockdowns were too severe and stifled economic activity. We'll only be able to assess after the fact which broad view is correct. Of course, as vaccines have become available, the South African government has sought, procured and rolled them out with the private sector playing a central role. This took time to get underway but now this is happening at significant scale. As of last week, 21% of adults had received at least one dose of the vaccine. But clearly, this is nowhere near the 80% level targeted.

In terms of the response from the DTIC, there have been some positive aspects from the pandemic, such as success in mobilising production of PPE, especially masks, drawing on capacity in our clothing sector. A number of factories could re-orient activity to produce masks. There was also a project to produce ventilators, which got started very quickly, with the aim of scaling up production of a fairly basic "fit-for-purpose" ventilator. South Africa is one of the few African countries which has the capacity to manufacture some vaccines. One private company, Aspen Pharmaceuticals, has been producing significant numbers of doses largely under licence, mainly through fill-and-finish operations. There have been some limitations though, where vaccines produced here under contract for international pharmaceutical companies, have then been exported elsewhere. Now the emphasis has shifted, and greater attention is being paid to making these vaccines available to South Africa and the broader region. The publicly owned BioVac institute is also establishing a joint venture to develop stronger vaccine capacity for COVID and other diseases, expanding its existing production. We'll need to ramp up production since there is a massive requirement from the rest of the continent. Such a vaccine effort is not a one-off need but will generate ongoing requirements, for boosters, and so on. So BioVac is a very welcome development producing for the continent, the only other one being based in Dakar, Senegal.

Another significant area in which South Africa has been very active is on intellectual property rights, partnering with India to make the case for a TRIPS waiver to enable broader production of vaccines by developing countries. This very important multilateral initiative has not been universally supported. The US provided positive support, but the EU has not. However, the push for a TRIPS waiver has certainly brought pressure to bear on certain companies, and pushed them to act, even if they are not formally obligated to provide the IP, probably in order to forestall more interventionist measures around vaccines.

Another important aspect of our response has come from the agriculture and agri-food sectors which proved pretty resilient and continued supplying during the pandemic without significant disruptions. This is because they have a large local footprint with much less reliance on imports than other manufacturing industries. This is important going forward, with significance for the continent more broadly, since Building Back Better should mean economies are less geared towards "just-in-time" manufacturing systems. We must factor in the need for resilience, in our ability to produce the essentials – such as healthcare, pharmaceuticals, food and so forth. The COVID moment will have importance for the whole continent if it challenges us to strengthen production capabilities. Over the last few decades, there has been discouragement from conventional policy advice about building local production systems, and a view that you can always import the things you need. But the COVID crisis points to the need to change the structure of African economies. It is no longer sufficient to export primary and semi-processed commodities, we must find ways to add much more local value, and construct more sophisticated production structures. This is not a turning away from trade, but being more strategic about trade, and the role that it plays in structural transformation and broader economic development.

I enjoyed reading your article for Project Syndicate on the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, which argued you should avoid seeing this as a magic silver bullet. What does a strategic approach to trade mean in this context, and how could AfCFTA really help achieve structural transformation in different parts of

the continent? What else is essential, alongside a reduction in tariff barriers?

There are two broad approaches to trade. The first, an orthodox approach and second a more structuralist approach to trade. The first emphasizes bringing down trade barriers, whether tariff or non-tariff barriers. The structuralist approach is not anti-trade but asks - what is the appropriate role for trade for countries at a particular level of development? The breakthrough came from the great development economist Alice Amsden who wrote on South Korea. She pointed to countries seeking to develop a more sophisticated production structure needing to import more, by bringing in capital equipment essential to upgrade their manufacturing sector. In the case of Africa, there is also the need to import equipment to increase productivity growth in the agricultural sector. In order to increase capital imports, countries will need to generate exports, but this demands a very different approach to trade. It is not just a question of opening up, and saying let countries specialise in their comparative advantage, which really means specialising in what you do right now. When you look at broad patterns of production and trade, African countries tend to export primary and semi-processed commodities, while importing manufactured consumer goods. Let's see where this approach leads us by taking an example of neighbouring countries like Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Zambia overwhelmingly exports copper and DRC exports copper, cobalt and other minerals. So today, what is the basis for expanding trade between DRC and Zambia, unless they can change their production structure? If we take as the starting point the current production structure, growing trade on the continent necessarily implies countries changing that structure, starting with what they produce and looking for complementarities with other African countries. What light manufactured products do their neighbours demand which could replace imports from outside the continent? That's an important element.

When you look at trade analyses of the estimated benefits of the AfCFTA, they lump a lot into the general category of non-tariff barriers. Tariffs between African countries are actually not very high, but there are a lot of other barriers which need to be dealt with,

such as unnecessary red tape which doesn't serve any productive purpose and facilitates rent-seeking and corruption. However, the biggest category of non-tariff barriers reflects infrastructural backlogs in ports, roads, rail and energy systems, and IT networks. Even some border-post blockages to some extent require an investment in improving digital processes, to gain greater efficiency. Upgrading border-posts is tangibly different from regulatory obstacles which can be signed away at the flick of a pen.

We live with the paradox that the continent has historically contributed the least to global CO₂ emissions but now must upgrade energy systems, without the opportunities that other countries have had. If a country has coal reserves, it now has to sterilise those reserves for very good reasons - but where is the corresponding international support to help build greener infrastructure? Financing this infrastructure and structural upgrading is terribly important. Although there is a strong moral case for the global North to make available a very large amount of concessional funding, it is not clear that this obligation will in fact be met. It would be a mistake for the African continent to hold its breath and wait for the global North to do the right thing. So, the question is how to get our own financial institutions to meet this challenge. Development banks have a central role here, scaling them up to give them the mass they need, not as a substitute for private investment but as a complement and catalyst for larger scale private investment on the continent.

A good number of analysts say the COVID pandemic offers a valuable opportunity to rethink priorities and development pathways, because it has shown up the need for a broader, more diverse economy, the importance of regional trade, and the possibilities from greener growth. Do you think this is indeed a turning point for the continent, and what kind of economic thinking is key to driving reform?

It certainly represents an opportunity, but it won't automatically represent a turning point, unless we make it so. The first element for making this a turning point is a much larger-scale public health response to the crisis itself. "Our World in Data" shows which countries are not on track to vaccinate 40% of their people by 2022. States not on track are overwhelmingly African countries. We need a

dramatic scale-up of vaccine provision to the continent. It seems the contributions to COVAX have not been anything like at the scale required. Vaccine allocation has followed geopolitical considerations rather than those of need. The US has partnered to provide significant vaccinations to south Asia, which is more a function of responding to Chinese influence than really taking a good look at the most urgent parts of the planet. And the North has been vaccine hoarding. So, first of all, we need a massification of vaccine provision.

Going forward, yes there is a great opportunity for the continent, but let me highlight what we must do. There is tremendous agricultural opportunity on the continent, which doesn't get the emphasis needed. There is a large stock of land which could be cultivated, which is currently either not farmed or is not generating the yields found elsewhere. There remains a big need to raise yields of staple crops. There is recent interesting work, by [Cramer, Sender and Oqubay](#), which talks about the "industrialisation of freshness". Structural transformation is not limited to traditional manufacturing sectors. When you look at parts of the agricultural sector, there is tremendous scope to transform and upgrade, especially in horticulture. COVID has increased demand for things like citrus fruit, which are high in vitamin C. The rising affluent middle classes are demanding high value fresh produce. This represents an enormous opportunity to lift many people out of poverty, alongside more conventional manufacturing. Some good work has [come out of UNU-WIDER](#) recently showing the absolute number of people employed in manufacturing in Africa has actually increased in the last two decades, although productivity growth has been modest. There is definitely more African manufacturing than has traditionally been perceived, which can further be built upon. There is the widespread idea of leapfrogging – sometime used loosely – but there really is a chance that solar and wind power could help African countries leapfrog into renewables-based energy. Mining also has a role to play. The big change to be managed involves the shift from "climate destructive minerals", such as coal and oil, to making the most of "climate smart minerals". The continent has a very large stock of minerals essential for the green transition – cobalt, copper, platinum group metals and nickel for example. Let's not be anti-mining, but rather

ask how mining can help achieve structural change and contribute to green transitions. Going back to trade, while we should not expect the AfCFTA to be a silver bullet, it makes sense to expand regional trade, and understand when to expand trade to the rest of the world. Trade offers the chance to export to those markets with the highest growth, which can generate the most value for African countries. Again, let's be strategic in our thinking about trade. Don't take a blinkered view which focuses only on the rest of the continent.

Energy and power are critical for transformation of the economy. South Africa has big coal reserves, which power a large part of the energy system. There has been a series of "Just Transition" dialogues in each province in South Africa, to explore how to shift away from coal. How might this transition happen – given South Africa's energy profile – to bring the country to net zero by 2050/60 and which brings people along with you?

Part of the Green Transition is a technical exercise, which involves assessing appropriate technologies and markets, and asks what countries and firms can produce, given their capabilities, and how to upgrade these. But this transition to green energy is evidently not just a technical question. It needs an analysis of the political economy to manage this structural change. The political economy dimensions are more challenging than the technical, though clearly, they are meshed together. What makes South Africa's transition very challenging is we have a lot of coal, and many interests associated with coal, so it's entirely understandable, since many thousands are employed in coal mining. What do you say to those workers in the coal sector? You can't say we all face a wonderful green future, if they won't be able to feed themselves and their families. What are the alternative employment opportunities which can be generated as part of the transition? That is challenging in the South African context where we already have very high levels of unemployment. Then alongside the coal miners, there are shareholders, and those involved in the logistics, the trucking of coal from mines to power plants. There is no neat answer. No-one has been able to say when we lose jobs in coal mining in the province of Mpumalanga that these people can easily find employment in

some other industries. There may be some jobs associated with solar power plants, but they don't themselves employ a lot of people directly. But if we don't seize the moment now, we set ourselves up for failure in the future. When Carbon Border Taxes kick in, and funding dries up for coal mines, it will become a dead-end industry. We need to recognise this. I would like to see a lot more detailed technical work, sector by sector, to identify what alternative jobs there might be for people with the same skills as coal mining. Again, horticulture is one part of the story, certain kinds of manufacturing might fill the gap, but its hyper-competitive since the 1990s when China, India, and eastern Europe entered the global manufacturing economy. A fair transition requires a lot more work – there are no easy answers. The other area important for Africa is the willingness to recognise gas as a transition fuel. Everyone is clear there will be no more coal in the medium to long term, but what about gas reserves? There is a strong push from environmentalists to say “don't go with gas”, but I think there needs to be more openness to this option. Don't let's cut off gas development as it represents a cleaner form of energy on the way to net zero.

From what we've seen so far, the pandemic has highlighted the growing crisis of multilateralism. What is your analysis of rivalry between nations and blocs, and relations between China and US? What are some actions and positions for Africa to take in the current global context?

This is very difficult to answer. I think it's important for African countries and other developing nations to continue to support developmental multilateralism and ensure policy space, to enable appropriate policies to be put in place. The Doha round has been limping along, and it's been impossible to conclude this, largely due to the pushback by rich economies against Special and Differentiated Treatment for developing countries. African countries need to push on multiple multilateral fronts and stay engaged with what is happening bilaterally. For example, countries have all signed up for the AfCFTA but there is also a strong push from the UK and EU to sign up individual countries in Africa to agreements which could punch a hole in parts of the AfCFTA. Some have decided to both sign up and go along with a bilateral

process – it certainly complicates things. One area of importance is what's happening in the digital space. There is intense pressure from the US to implement certain trade rules which place as many restrictions as possible on countries developing their own policy measures and responses to the digital economy. In the US proposal there are two dozen things they want to see bedded down in this agreement on the digital economy. For example, they say you can't tax digital transactions or insist on localisation of servers, or restrict the flow of digital trade and associated transactions. But, in a context where we don't really know what the future of the digital economy looks like, it would be dangerous for developing countries to sign up and thereby handcuff themselves in perpetuity to this set of rules. They need to preserve the policy space. They are presented with magical ideas of how they can leapfrog economic development by better access to digital platforms. But the idea is not really developed. It can be tantalising for them to see this magical thing called digitalisation, but they should not be signing away their rights now. It's not just an economic issue but a question of what kind of digital rights we seek in terms of privacy, of human rights. In a way, there are two dystopian visions for digital platforms, those which are as intrusive as possible to sell as much stuff as possible, and the others which desire to have access to as much personal information as possible to exercise political control. To me this is a poverty of choice for the bulk of developing countries. Why should we sign up to either of these dystopian visions? Digital technology should be serving much less cynical ends.

There is a lot of talk about the need to mobilise investment for Africa's development, both from international and domestic sources. Yet the question remains of how in practice you get domestic investors to put their money into, say, local food or energy systems. There is often an absence of channels for mobilising savings, such as local pension funds. You've mentioned Development Banks. There are a few mega-investors like Mr Dangote of Nigeria, and lots of micro-enterprise, but there seems to be a big missing middle. What's the means to get commercial banks, and other parts of the financial system better able to mobilise and channel funds into productive activity?

There are no easy answers, but it points to an area which requires further analysis. We need to ask - what is the purpose of the financial system and its architecture, and how to develop this so it supports structural change? South Africa offers a cautionary tale, having seen very rapid growth in the finance sector since democracy. Over this period, the financial sector has doubled its share in GDP but there remain very low savings and investment rates. The financial sector is not doing the thing that they're meant to do, which is to mobilise savings and channel them to fixed investment. We need to distinguish "magical thinking" from a sober assessment of financial sector directions. There has been tremendous hype around development of "fintech" and micro-credit. Kenya is always held up as a shining light, with its M-PESA mobile money initiative. But a cold hard look is needed to make the financial sector fit for purpose, drawing on lessons from elsewhere, to make it less geared to extending unsustainable levels of consumer credit and speculation, and better suited to mobilising long term savings for investments. National Development Banks have a fundamental role to play, to scale-up and enable critical mass where there is much fragmentation. African development banks are often undercapitalised. They might better group into larger scale sub-regional banks to have the capacity and scale needed. Having multiple countries as shareholders could improve their governance and offer some protection from political influence. They could draw people onto the board from, say, China's Development Bank, from Germany's KfW, from Brazil's BNDES, to explore innovative ways to address these problems. There is also the broader question of the design of the financial sector. It can be very difficult for smaller countries to pursue a path that is radically different from what is expected. There is tremendous pressure to conform to expectations and to external models.

Francis Akindes, University of Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire : We Africans urgently need a different approach to economic thinking.

Francis Akindes is a sociologist and Professor at the University of Alassane Ouattara (UAO), Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire. Professor Akindes is President of the UAO's Science Council, and also Director of Programmes, UNESCO Chair in Bioethics. His research interests are diverse, covering political transitions, political violence, the political economy of inequality, public policy analysis, and policies for crises exits.



For nearly two years now, the world has been reeling from the impact of the pandemic. Based as you are in Côte d'Ivoire, how do you assess the pandemic's economic and social impacts on the country, and more importantly, for the youth? How do you evaluate the measures taken by the Government to address the crisis, and have the country's economists, or even the Continent's economists, been involved in formulating these measures?

To begin, in Africa, in Ivory Coast, the pandemic started in March 2020. Like everywhere else, progressively, everything came to a stop in African countries, too. A catastrophe was predicted, and we were all urged to maintain strict sanitary measures. Among Governments, the politicians were faced with imposition of progressively radical measures, "Should we lock down our people?". Every country had to decide on such measures, with undoubtedly heavy social, economic and political consequences. African countries took varying paths, but those who established strict bio-security measures such as total lockdowns or curfews, witnessed clear and immediate impacts, when you consider that the informal sector employs around 80% of the workforce.

These self-employed people, when they stop work, they have no income. Asking them to stay at home because of the pandemic threat is not a lasting solution. Two or three days after the imposition of lockdowns, we saw protests like those in Senegal and South Africa. Clearly, lockdown as an approach to containing the

pandemic had its limits. Then came measures aimed at reducing the spread, such as wearing masks: which were very expensive and difficult to find at the start; and social distancing: as I have said previously on multiple platforms, maintaining physical and social distancing in Africa is a luxury. Lockdown works for the wealthy who live in small numbers in large houses. For everyone else, in crowded housing and neighbourhoods, the population density is just too high. You find 7 to 10 people under the same roof, it's impossible to ask people to both stay at home and to maintain distance from others in the house.

So for a large proportion of people, these rules could not be applied. Some countries, such as Benin, refused to impose a lockdown. Benin's President said he could not take the political risk of demanding people stay at home, given that the country had no resources to make up for the constraints he had imposed on them. Instead, Benin brought in measures such as face masks, hygiene improvement, distancing in public places, as have many other African countries. Most African countries have perhaps chosen this path - putting measures in place but not being stringent about them - which allowed them to be seen as following international guidelines, especially those from the WHO. These governments put measures in place but, strategically, left the responsibility of complying to these measures up to individuals. So, there is this farce of national measures and controls, but their implementation is *laissez-faire* which also speaks to the weak powers of these Governments.

These Governments made decisions not to monitor and punish those who flouted the rules, since they didn't have clear, credible alternatives which would compensate for loss of incomes from strict adherence to the rules. By these means, governments could avoid risks of protests and the political cost of forcing measures to be applied. In so many countries, there exist already pockets of fragility, frustrations, scarred communities from previous crises which would be badly stirred up and exacerbated by unpopular and damaging new controls over peoples' lives. African peoples already have multiple reasons to be tired of their governments, so heavy-handed restrictions to deal with the pandemic could provide the political opportunity for old anger and resentment to boil over.

Governments really fear these kind of unpredictable situations, so they did all they could do, with great caution, to apply measures but not be too stringent about them. From an economic point of view, in the beginning there was a global shutdown like I pointed out, some sectors such as tourism were especially hit as they depend on international migration of people. The leisure sector, such as restaurants - whether indoors or outdoors - cinemas, nightclubs and other places people go to enjoy themselves, all these businesses had to close. You can well imagine the social and economic risks associated with the loss of employment in these activities, with most of these being informal enterprise. In a city like Abidjan, food preparation and sale are dominated by women, and their little cafes and roadside stalls, known as 'maquis', were all forced to shut.

During the curfew, everyone had to get home by 9pm, whereas it's the night-time when so many clubs and bars do the best business, so you can only imagine the cost for small enterprises. In fact, it was all business, small and large, across the country which suffered, in spite of their own strategies to minimise the pandemic's impact. The ports no longer functioned normally, affecting all import-export businesses. Remember that for a country like ours, 90% of its trade comes by sea. Those ships from countries badly hit by Coronavirus were not coming anymore. So we began to see shortages of goods, even of real essentials.

With the uneven spread and evolution of the virus between Europe, North America, and Africa, we did not experience the catastrophe that had been predicted. After six months, different governments in Africa could see it would be impossible to continue with tight measures, and had to relax them for the sake of the economy. Increasingly, people began to ask themselves, why should we be following the same COVID policy route as Europe and North America, if we were not suffering the same health impacts from the pandemic. This question was especially pertinent given the inability of African governments to compensate businesses and people for their income losses, as had been possible in North America and Europe.

France, for example, was able to do a lot for those businesses damaged by the lockdown. In a number of African cases, states made such

promises but they were not able to do much in practice. There has been a lot of criticism on social media regarding the criteria used by government to decide who should receive relief. One year on, there is no more talk of government support, and every business has been working out how best to run their enterprise, adapting to the requirements. Today, we're faced with mutations of the virus, but for many people there remains a fundamental doubt about whether the virus exists at all. In a city like Abidjan, when you go from better-off residential neighbourhoods to low-income areas, you find a big difference in mask-wearing. It's much more common in Cocody than in Abobo or Yopougon.

At the beginning of the crisis, I went around a lot of low-income neighbourhoods because I was being asked by a number of media channels to give them news of how ordinary people were coping with the health measures. As a result, I spent a good bit of time listening to people in wards such as Abobo and Yopougon. There was almost unanimous agreement that the virus didn't exist, and was an ailment of white people, and those who spend time with them, those who travel. None of the people in these neighbourhoods went by air, and thus did not think the health measures the government wished to impose applied to them. The public authorities were conscious of the need to avoid annoying ordinary people, by forcing measures on them, for reasons I mentioned earlier, and opted for communicating the risks of the disease rather than forcing adherence to sanitary measures.

In these neighbourhoods, in spite of their denial of COVID, there are of course people who are employed for domestic work (driver, servant, cook, etc.) for those who they reckon at risk, due to them living like Europeans, or being in close contact with them. They go to work in areas like Cocody, a well-off neighbourhood, and may contract the virus at work as a result, and then bring it home. Sadly, they don't always think about the risk of moving between these worlds of work and home, and the associated risks of infection, even for "those who never take a plane" as they like to say. Such connections between neighbourhoods have not been part of the public outreach and messaging aimed at changing people's pattern of behaviour relative to the pandemic.

Another angle which I would like to explore is the lack of research on why the predicted catastrophe did not occur. Currently we can only hypothesize. First, we have the youthful composition of Africa's population. Second, there is the climate, which may have been in Africa's favour. Third, is the widespread use of chloroquine (used as anti-malarial treatment). At the moment, we can only speculate about the importance of these and other reasons for the lack of impact such as that experienced by Europe or America.

Africa remains weak when faced by this kind of threat. We have not yet taken onboard that we must try to understand what is happening, using rational methods, as is done by scientific research. We often retreat into a narrative which states that we don't have the means to do research ourselves because we are poor and have other priorities. But I would say we are poor precisely because we don't tend to set aside some resources to generate the knowledge which would help map out and prevent these risks. It's as though we have chosen to live in darkness and uncertainty.

What role have economists played in shaping public policy to address the pandemic?

In almost all countries, there has been a culture of "omerta" (or a pledge of silence) as regards how the pandemic has been handled. There has been no debate amongst scholars about the measures taken, and no one knows how decisions were taken. Let's take the example of air-travel requirements between ECOWAS member states when the land borders were shut. Some governments slapped a tax on COVID tests. Take the case of Benin. While some member states of WAEMU agreed to lower the price to FCFA 25,000, Benin decided to keep it at FCFA 50,000. They also chose to test all arrivals coming into the country, regardless of where they came from, and even when they had a negative test result from their place of origin. This meant that tests were re-done in Benin as though tests done elsewhere weren't considered valid, as though each laboratory everywhere was not using the same testing kit. It wasn't until February 2021 that Benin stopped this practice, and its not only Benin which has generated contradictory and ambiguous COVID health rules. There are a whole range of political, economic and financial issues at stake, which remain to be explored, in how certain countries have addressed the

pandemic.

Lastly, you have to ask whether it is really a question of managing infection risk at the border, and preventing wider infection of the population, or whether it's the revenue associated with carrying out these tests. You see, you have to ask what is the logic of these tests being free within the country, whereas those travelling to neighbouring countries have to pay. It's likely that air passengers are considered amongst the privileged few, with sufficient purchasing power, and hence they are targeted as a form of racket. When I read in the media that African governments responded promptly and effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic, I beg to differ. It is true the catastrophe did not happen, but the choices made by each and every government should be analysed further.

In your written work, you speak of the need for African countries to develop a model of economic growth more rooted in the African context, in which less attention is paid to the policy prescriptions of the World Bank and IMF, and greater focus given to satisfying national needs. You talk about the huge importance of the informal sector, in terms of both production and employment. Is it possible for this sector to furnish the foundations for a different growth model in many parts of Africa? What would this imply for the role of government, given its reliance on revenue from formal sources? What might be better forms of education able to respond more adequately to the needs of people for the economy of today and tomorrow?

The informal sector provides the foundations for the real, tangible economy in almost all African countries. It's quite wrong to call this the "informal" sector, since it is highly visible, it just escapes the attention of government accounts. Government attitudes towards the informal sector are influenced most of all by a reflex to impose taxation, to increase its fiscal revenues, by targeting any and all activity. It may seem quite normal that, as soon as you start up some business, you must start paying taxes. But as the informal sector sees it, they cannot point to any help which the state provides them, so what are they paying for? Rather, they tend to be targeted and harassed by the state. Countries have always looked outwards, since Independence, seeking to make themselves attractive to foreign investors, and promoting SMEs which can feed

into global value chains, as urged by the Bretton Woods institutions. Recentering policy towards addressing local, national and regional needs requires a very different approach.

Economic policy can be read as a continuation of the colonial model. It's been difficult to reinvent the system to better address national priorities set in a regional context. What might we mean by "reinvent"? If globalisation can be seen as an opportunity for national economies to face outwards, responding to local, national or regional needs has to think about local demand, and how to meet it. This includes strengthening abilities within the economic system, in terms of education and training, and the achievement of some degree of autonomy, as a means to assure sovereignty. Africa's population structure represents a significant asset. Despite the demographic transition, Africa today accounts for nearly 17% of the total world population. While demographic growth rates elsewhere have fallen since the 1960s, to around 1% p.a., the African continent has seen its number of people increase by 2.7% p.a. Rather than see this growth in the number of people in Africa as a constraint and challenge, you could re-frame such differential growth rates as offering great potential, and a great economic opportunity. This would be possible if well thought out public policy could transform this human material into human capital, by re-centering economic models to meet internal demand. However, now, such a demographic evolution increases domestic demand and based on our current model, we must seek external help to respond to domestic needs. We are almost entirely external-facing, we produce what we don't consume, transforming very little raw material, and we consume what we don't produce which is mostly brought in from outside. To find work for Africa's unemployed, the World Bank recommends investment in training. But we need to ask – what kind of training? They say: professional and technical, and private professional and technical training schools have opened their doors in many an African city. They each offer more or less identical courses, training people in particular skills which they think correspond to the needs of business. This is how the training is sold to parents and apprentices. But there is then an over-supply of young people with this training. There is a failure to clarify what is meant by training and expertise, and many African

counties lack a clear vision for what is needed over the forthcoming years and decades. The kind of skills identified are usually those which multinational companies and local businesses involved in export-led value-chains have put forward.

These training needs will likely evolve rapidly, and do not necessarily align either with the opportunistic vision of private training establishments, or with poorly framed state policy for education and training, neither of which show much flexibility. Overall, we see that rates of employment in the professional field for the newly trained – those coming out of the private schools – are just slightly ahead of the performance in the jobs market for those with a classical training coming out of the university sector. We can observe that the current existing solutions for youth unemployment neither respond to the needs of local goods and services nor to the reorientation of the system to respond to the actual needs.

Notably, reinforcing the informal sector capacity, all activities included, to improve its ability to meet day-to-day demands for goods and services at acceptable quality standards. Raising the quality and performance of the goods and services generated by the informal sector, which represents - as we have said - 80% of the real economic life of most countries, could in itself constitute a significant training programme to strengthen expertise, create value add, and improve revenues for enterprise, and additions to the country's overall wealth. By pursuing such well thought-out policies, the state itself could achieve positive outcomes, in terms of society and equity. And in return, it could see its investment pay a good return through rising tax revenue which would stem from improved economic performance.

Without turning away from the world economy, African countries would nevertheless gain from pulling away from the neo-liberal pretence, and become more sovereign in their choice of economic policy, less subject to the catechism of the Bretton Woods institutions. Remember their mission is to promote economic orthodoxy, which in the case of countries in the South demands that their economies must adjust to neo-liberal norms, at the heart of which is the retreat of the state. Despite this, it is clear from the last thirty years

of experience in south-east Asia that, by contrast to the World Bank, low-income countries can only exit from the poverty trap with massive state intervention, and protection.

The Bretton Woods institutions know that they operate in situations of penury, a context of long-standing and permanent asymmetry in power between them and the national governments, the latter which is in desperate need of financial resources, for a majority of the time, to manage crises. These are not situations in which alternative ideas can flower and prosper. Let's compare Africa with Asia or Latin America, all with different political histories. When the World Bank and IMF get off the plane in an African country, they come with expertise and conditionalities which accompany the immediate offer of cash. Given the urgent need for resources, the policy recommendations are bound to be accepted by government. Within most African countries, no thought is given to ways of responding to internal domestic needs. For African countries, the Bretton Woods institutions know there is no space for reflection to think through economic alternatives, there are no alternative models.

So, the domination of international capital keeps national economies dependent on financial markets through debt, in turn strengthening the persistence of international capital – the reason why in many African countries, you have two economies working side-by-side with no interconnectedness. We have the informal economy which responds to the needs of domestic consumers, while the so-called formal sector which responds to essential needs but is external-facing, heavily taxed by the state due to its visibility and is limited in scale. The Governments are dependent on the formal sector for fiscal revenues, while the private sector remarks constantly that the high tax rates are a burden – both ignoring the fact that they could overcome these different challenges if they would reinforce the capacity of the informal sector. But African Governments only see how they can impose themselves on the informal sector and not how to support them – the informal sector in Africa responds to the real needs of African in every sector, including health. In any African market, you will find stalls with local remedies, alternative

medicines and so much else. People very often turn to the informal health sector when they cannot afford the cost of modern drugs, which in turn denies them access to health services. They depend on alternative medicine to continue to care for their health. If Governments really cared about their people, why would they not bridge alternative medicine and the high cost of modern medicine, to ensure inclusion of people from all walks of life in access to health services taking into account the ethics of both medicine streams? Why not support, for example, a series of research activities to explore the attributes of traditional medicine, and work out questions of dosage? Solutions from traditional medicine can be very effective, however, what stops us from using science to back up prescriptions that can heal ten distinct illnesses at the same time, and guarantee a more inclusive, caring health system for everyone? Why don't we start work on this? Because we've been captured by the interests of large drug companies, who want to protect their markets, and have no interest in what we might term "neglected illnesses".

In all aspects of life, we have this kind of phenomenon. I chose the example of the health sector, but, equally, you could find the same forces at work in the agri-food business or in the big socio-economic sectors. We ignore the part of the economy which responds to the needs of the large majority, and focus instead on those dimensions which insert the African economy into international dynamics, guaranteeing the government a certain basic level of revenue. This is usually just enough to enable it to function, but which demands that it must go into heavy debt in order to invest in the social and economic infrastructure needed to address people's most basic priorities. I find this discrepancy in our thinking totally incomprehensible.

Many analysts we have spoken to agree that the pandemic has opened up space for African countries to rethink their development choices, speed up regional integration, diversifying their economies, and pursue green growth.... Do you think that we are indeed at a real turning point for economic transformation in Africa and what route would you recommend?

I noticed, that at the height of the pandemic, it was as though the world had ground to a halt. Wherever we were in the world, we began to

understand that a big event had happened, and we had to change how we lived. Equally, fairly soon, I noticed that as soon as the sickness levels started to fall, many people were desperate to get back to pre-pandemic "normal", as though COVID was just a short, bracketed phase in our lives. While the airplanes were nailed to the ground, we had said that we would build a different, better future, more in touch with nature and the environment. Having seen how people have contributed so much pollution, and what happens when it stops.

During lockdowns, we all had generous ideas for changing our lives, and bringing us into greater harmony with nature and the environment. It was a time of repentance for the pattern of life we've been living, whether in Africa, in Europe, or in America. The pandemic has not hit us as hard like in America and Europe but, in Africa, as elsewhere, our conversations held many promises about living simpler, cleaner lives, and being more respectful of Mother Nature. We all accepted and believed that we had been trapped in a pattern of life which was a dead-end for humanity. But, what happened once the pandemic started to retreat? We went back to our old ways of life! We forgot every promise we'd made a few months before, as though we'd never had this moment for deeper thinking. Despite our ongoing travails with new variants – delta and now omicron – I see no sign at all of people putting such promises into action and living up to the alternative visions we dreamed at the height of the crisis. I come back again and again to the phrase – reflection on alternatives – because alternative reflections have a cost and demand engagement. It presumes there is some kind of support which makes such reflection possible, since thought about a better future cannot come from nothing. But I can detect no shift in fields of research or public policy in Africa as a consequence of the pandemic. Imagine that this thinking is nurtured in closed circles, we see no sign of any shift in approach to our patterns of life or economic system. We seem to find it too difficult to shift our model because we, perhaps, find the current system sufficiently comfortable, with its existing chapels, and prophets. We have not seen new niches emerging in which people seek out alternatives. It's as though we are face-to-face with a big wall which we have no way of

scaling, and the existing model and powers-that-be are securely seated on top of the wall. There is effective propaganda to ensure we all carry on without blinking. If we are to get beyond our current impasse, we must create the space, the determination, and political will, to reinvent ourselves in different parts of the world. But I see absolutely no evidence of this happening. African countries are especially poorly served given their relentless cycle of urgent crises. Political decisions are made almost always in haste, with thoughtful consideration of options seen as a luxury for rich countries alone.

Côte d'Ivoire finds itself in a difficult neighbourhood, with a number of northern neighbours – Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger – who are engulfed by jihadist insurgency. What practical measures might countries like yours, Ghana, Benin and Togo take to push back the threat of jihadism ?

Extremist violence and its growth is a persistent threat in coastal West Africa, with some countries like Benin and Côte d'Ivoire having already experienced attacks both in their northern parts, and Côte d'Ivoire experiencing attacks even in its southern parts. This means that this extremist violence is no longer confined to the Sahelian hinterland, and is now moving into coastal countries which are proving to be equally vulnerable. Both types of countries, those who are engulfed by the extremist violence, and those who are only now beginning to experience it, have something in common – social and political fragility as a result of intercommunal tensions and identity crises, linked to either access to land and natural resources in a context of climate change, or the inequalities in the distribution of access to these resources. The forced idleness of youth, due to unemployment,

is a fertile ground for jihadist recruitment. The economy of violence and conflict offers an alternative way of life for those with no clear future, and jihadism proposes itself as a means to address some of the big injustices found in our societies. Islamic religious arguments are no more than a front for those who are mobilising this violent extremism, profiting from recrimination against government and capitalising on the multiple and diverse frustrations felt by populations in these countries.

In the Sahelian hinterland, governments are so weak that they are unable to respond to the needs of their people, especially those in marginalised zones. Often with a strong sense of social injustice, and no evidence of government support, these populations are fall prey to those using narrative, political ideology and violence to establish an Islamic state or a return of the caliphate. The insurgents aim to dislodge Westerners and overthrow the corrupt, puppet states put in place by the Western powers. They finance themselves through a range of illicit activities, the workforce for which are large numbers of young people who would find the formal economy less attractive in terms of compensations. Violent extremism is above all a response to failed development models. A military approach in these areas has not been successful so far, given the continued spread of jihadism. Our modes of governance have failed, and we have not integrated into our understanding the great weakness and fragility of our states. Jihadism can root itself very effectively in the fertile soil created by those forgotten populations, seeking revenge for decades of neglect.

African Regional and Multilateral Leadership

John Nkengasong, Africa CDC: “A Collective Regional Approach Has Shown Its Power” November 2021.

In this interview for INET’s COVID-19 and Africa series, Folashadé Soulé and Camilla Toulmin discuss with Dr. John Nkengasong, Director of Africa CDC, about vaccine manufacturing in Africa, how the regional initiatives led by Africa CDC to address the pandemic and vaccine shortages have proven to be effective and the four key measures required for a new public health paradigm. John Nkengasong currently serves as Director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, a specialized technical institution of the African Union. In early 2020, he was appointed as one of the WHO Director-General’s Special Envoys on COVID-19 Preparedness and Response. In addition, Dr. Nkengasong was most recently awarded the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s 2020 Global Goalkeeper Award for his contributions to the continental response in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa. Dr. Nkengasong serves on several international advisory boards including the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Initiative (CEPI) and the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), among others.



Africa has been affected by vaccine hoarding and the vaccine roll-out has been slow in several parts of the continent. Africa CDC has spearheaded several innovative initiatives, among which is the African Union’s Africa Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT). Yet a major reason for the low vaccination rate in Africa is the lack of available supplies: Africa manufactures less than 1% of all vaccines administered on the continent. Several efforts are being made to ramp up production of COVID-19 vaccines on the African continent (with at least twelve COVID-19 production facilities proposed) but how can African countries best scale up local vaccination production for the long term?

Africa has to step back and look at the devastation that COVID has brought to the

continent, and of course the whole world, and also recognize that it’s the continent with the fastest-growing population. We are 1.2 billion today and the population is projected to be 2.4 billion by the year 2050. If you look at the demographics, there is a point where Africa takes off while Asian and other countries are flattening out. This has a lot of implications for Africa’s own health security, and vaccines are the best tools that you have in your box to fight infectious diseases. As you rightly said, only 1% of our vaccines are produced on the continent. That means we import 99% which is clearly not sustainable. We have also seen that there is a behaviour divide: when the continent is faced with what I call ‘routine vaccines’ which are regularly consumed in this part of the world, such as polio and others, there’s no scramble. We have peace, global peace, and nobody contests that. But when there are vaccines or products where there is scarcity globally, the continent is immediately paying the price for its own inability to produce vaccines and is completely left behind.

People say many fanciful things, speaking from the pulpit at international meetings. No one there says the wrong thing, but the right thing - which speaks of solidarity and equitable access - is not delivered. This behaviour gap between what you say and what you do has to be managed. So, let’s step back to ask: what are some of the things that must be done? It’s very easy to say: “Africa, you have to manufacture your own vaccine! why are you not doing that?” Let’s look at the vaccines which no one is competing for: the childhood immunization vaccines. The market for these vaccines has been designed so that the Global Vaccine Alliance (Gavi), raises resources from donor countries and foundations, and takes them to India and China, which produce those vaccines and then ship them to Africa. That is the current scheme. Africa cannot produce vaccines if there is no market for the vaccines. We have to start off by saying: how do we shape the market in such a way that Africa can get into that venture, knowing there will be somebody to buy the vaccine. It’s the basic economics of demand and supply. Here we find ourselves in a situation where we ought to build health systems before we need them, rather than when we’ve been hit by COVID-19

and the lessons of the past are playing out. In 1996, HIV-Aids drugs were available but it was a global scramble to get them. Africa did not have access to these drugs, and it took 10 years before initiatives like PEPFAR, and the Global Fund came in and re-shaped the market. Then Africa started having access, but in the meantime, 10 million victims of HIV-Aids had died in Africa. In 2009, the H1N1 swine fever virus arrived, and it was feared to lead to a pandemic. Luckily it didn't get to the level we are seeing with COVID today. Vaccines for H1N1 only arrived in Africa and other parts of the developing world when the epidemic was over.

Now we have the COVID pandemic which hit the world in late 2019. Around February 14, 2020, Africa recorded its first cases. We had no diagnostics, and we had to scramble for whatever we could find. Remember the discussion at that time was access to diagnostics. Everybody talks about vaccines now, but we very quickly forget that we were very vocal about diagnostics when this all started, because Africa had no diagnostic capacity. And now here we are with COVAX and the idea of global cooperation and solidarity around vaccines. Everybody said 'let's have COVAX'; we'll have a global basket of vaccines and if they all are shown to be efficacious, everybody will get it at the same time. But today, the African continent of 1.2 billion people has only 4% of its population fully immunized. What a contrast with other continents! That is the situation.

Where do we go from here? Africa has to take its own health security, its own destiny, in its hands, taking a coordinated approach to the whole vaccine ecosystem. This is very important. If African countries operate in isolation and address it as a matter of pride for each individual country, then collectively we cannot succeed. Vaccine production requires a crude analogy, like manufacturing the Airbus, where many parts are made all over Europe, but the final aircraft is produced in France. We are encouraging the continent to follow the Airbus approach. Look at the entire ecosystem for vaccine manufacturing and then encourage any country in Africa that is interested to build industries that can supply parts of the production chain. For example, a country can say "we will only be producing lipids for vaccines, or will produce the vials". I was at the

Aspen factory in South Africa where they are doing the "fill and finish" for Johnson & Johnson and I took up the palette of vials and asked "where is this coming from?" They said from China. So, even if you produce the vaccines, but cannot supply the vials, we cannot put it in the arms, right? We are calling for an eco-system approach that will reverse this tendency of only producing 1% of the vaccines we need. By the year 2040, we should be able to produce 60% of our vaccines. We had a meeting in April, where Heads of State like Presidents Kagame, Ramaphosa, Tsishekedi, and others confirmed we should start this journey together and, as we speak, we're finalizing a framework that will guide us to reach at least 60% production in the next 20 to 25 years.

Many have called for the pandemic to be considered as an opportunity to "build back better", and to improve the capacity to better prevent, detect, and respond to health emergencies. How do you see African governments using the crisis as a way to trigger a new health paradigm in Africa?

I'm happy you talk about a new health paradigm. We are calling it a "new public health order for Africa". Those who enjoy the status quo think we are preaching another Pan-Africanism. But what we all see is that the continent is late in taking its own security aspirations into its own hands. We are also saying that it is time that Africa begins to do those things regionally, for its collective health security, and limits dependence on others - which is what the North wants to see as well, I think. When partners like the UK, France, USA, and China come to me and say: "I want to do a certain thing", I say "what we are seeing is the spirit of a new public health order, that has to be very pleasing to you because it says that your own bilateral donation is beginning to yield fruits. You can see that your taxpayers' money is finally going to do something for the continent as a whole, rather than a divided approach."

We need a new public health order that does four things:

First, pushes the continent to produce its own pandemic response and health security, commodities, vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics. As we speak, you'll be shocked to know that before COVID hit the continent,

there was absolutely no country in Africa that was producing diagnostics of any sort. None. I was also shocked when I reflected on my experience as an HIV expert for the past decades. Before I took this job, I spent 29 years working on HIV. The continent conducts about 150 million tests for HIV a year but there's no company or country in Africa that produces a simple rapid test. A rapid test is a very simple thing to create, which brings jobs, and technology transfer. If we were doing that as a continent, then when COVID came in, we'd have been able to repurpose the technology, the know-how, and the process into producing diagnostics for a new disease. We have to invest in this.

Second is having your own national public health institutions, like the China CDC. These are structures that enable you to react quickly. There's a difference between pandemic preparedness and pandemic response. Pandemic preparedness is when you train an army and you put them into a battle exercise, although there is no war to be fought. That is preparation. Then the day there's an enemy, they go out and know exactly what to do. But we just don't have that. For a continent of 55 member states, only about 15 countries have functional national Public Health Institutes. This network needs to emerge and spread. If you compare how the continent is fighting this pandemic and how it fought the Ebola outbreak in 2014, it's very different. I've had the chance to brief the Bureau of the Heads of State, made up of about 12 Heads of State on where we are with the pandemic, and what we should be doing with vaccines. It wasn't the case with Ebola, when we were scrambling, and didn't know what to do. The continent was very, very exposed. Now, if we do this right at a continental level, it fits into the global health security agenda that we all preach from Geneva to Atlanta to Paris to New York. But just saying that we need global health security, without strengthening the sub-components or redefining the architecture, is meaningless. You can all sit in New York and talk about global health, pandemic treaties, and so on, but we are not solving the problem. The real problem needs us to reset the button on health security architecture, looking at what we can put at a global level that can bring Africa together with Asia, Latin America, North America and Europe, and then at what each region can do.

I'm very encouraged that I'm becoming a consultant in regional CDCs. Just last week, I was on a long interview with the ASEAN countries, which want to set up their own public health agency. A few months ago, I was consulting free of charge with the Gulf states, which want to set their own Gulf CDC. This trend and the collection of these regional bodies will guarantee us the global health security that we have been talking about. It is not just one global body, like the WHO in Geneva. We've really seen the limits of multilateralism in this pandemic.

The third element is the workforce. As a continent of 1.2 billion people, we only have about 1,900 epidemiologists. We need about 6,000 right now, and we need to do that quickly. The same is true for many other health workers.

The fourth and last issue concerns domestic investment. We need to honour our own commitments as a continent. In 2001, leaders of the continent met in Abuja, and they said we'll commit 15% of national government budgets to strengthen healthcare. If we had followed through with this pledge, we would not be scrambling today. It doesn't necessarily solve all our problems, but you are ready to go, you are not waiting to be hit with a pandemic, not waiting for the UK government to send you PPEs or buy diagnostics, you can use your own resources to begin to fight. Why wait for partnerships? We will always be needing cooperation, collaboration, and partnership, but national governments must start by investing in their own health systems, for speedy action, as part of their health security.

The pandemic has shown the many advantages of coordinated, collective action by Africa CDC and other African institutions, with the WHO, the World Bank, and individual African countries, to address the sanitary crisis early on, look for financing, and identify different ways to engage suppliers. What are the key preliminary lessons that can be derived from this collective action and exercise of African agency for the future?

One lesson is that collectivism works, and regionalism has shown its power. That is very clear. Let us look at some initiatives that the continent has initiated and led: The [African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team](#) has secured 400 million doses of vaccines. Our objective is

1.6 billion doses of vaccines. If Africa through Africa CDC and the task force that President Ramaphosa has put in place can secure 800 million doses of vaccines, the equivalent of the 400 million vaccines from Johnson and Johnson, there is no group out there that can boast of such a number as we speak. COVAX has supplied the continent with only 30 million doses of vaccines, even though earlier in January we had received written notification that, by then we should have been supplied with 350 million doses of vaccines. The reality is that we have been supplied with 30 million doses of vaccines for 44 member states. We also established the [Africa Medical Supplies Platform](#) (AMSP), a platform where you can go and order any kind of commodity and where prices are standardized. There is also a [COVID Response fund](#) at the African Union. We've been mobilizing resources and using them to support countries most in need. We launched the partnership to scale-up testing. When we launched this, the continent of 1.2 billion had conducted only 350,000 tests. Today we have 90 million tests on the continent So collectivism and regionalism work. But we have not highlighted these achievements enough. Each of these initiatives, unfortunately, has been pushed back and fought very hard by forces from outside the continent. When we established the AMSP team, I can't tell you the noise we heard: "UNICEF has a platform for distribution in Denmark, why are you creating this?" And from the World Bank: "we will do this or supply you this". What an interesting set of reactions! As a disease virologist for 30+ years, I said last year on the 20th of August to the Bureau of the Heads of State that the continent would need at least 60% of its population to be immunized, to get rid of the pandemic. Have I been criticized and ridiculed, criticized and ridiculed, like somebody who didn't know what he was talking about? People spoke to the different ministers, saying "John is misleading you, COVAX is going to give you the vaccines and that is all you need." I thought, how are you going to get rid of these attitudes? Today I'm very pleased with our progress, but nobody has offered us an apology. The WHO is saying that we need to immunize at least 70% of the population by next year, and last week, President Biden had a summit which called for 70% immunization by the middle or end of next year. I think those kinds of things are really annoying, that a continent has

aspirations and knows what it wants to do, but our efforts are pushed back.

When we started AVATT, we were told: "why are you doing this? COVAX will be doing this for you. It creates a lot of misinformation and confusion in the minds of the ministers of health and finance." We went to each country in turn; when we went to Nigeria, we said to the minister "buy vaccines from AVATT". He said, "why would we be putting money into AVATT when COVAX has promised us that it would give us millions of these vaccines?" Where are we today? Only 4% of the population has been immunized on the continent. Now, every day, we hear that you cannot travel if you don't have proof of vaccination. I'm a multilateralist but we need to sit back and look at the limits of multilateralism.

The only failure for us is the failure to admit that there have been failures. With that, we should hit the reset button. We also need to humble ourselves and say the regions are doing something valuable, we can learn from these, and doing it regionally fits into the overall architecture. All the talk about global treaties, pandemic treaties, etc., doesn't make sense to me. We risk missing opportunities and people's memory is very short. If this pandemic eases next year, nobody will talk about all these lessons anymore. Remember the Ebola outbreak in West Africa? Very nice documents were written and published in very prestigious journals. The World Bank and the UN published very nice reports but, after two months, nobody remembered what those reports said. My fear is that we will be in the same situation with this crisis. In such an event, this would have become a wasted crisis.

It's been striking to see the relatively low case rates and mortality rates in Africa in comparison with many other parts of the world. How do you explain this? Is it due to relatively limited testing? Is it due to stronger underlying immunity? Or maybe it's the result of a youthful demographic pyramid with fewer health complications? What is your explanation?

I think nobody knows the answer to that now. There is ongoing research to understand what is going on. I would argue that it's a mixture of a lot of the things that you state. But if you look at the evolution of the pandemic, we are now seeing more and more deaths on the continent.

We saw limited deaths during the first wave. We saw increased deaths during the second wave, and we saw even more dramatic deaths during the third wave. As of today, the continent has officially recorded 212,000 deaths and about 80,000 of those deaths occurred in the last three months during the third wave, because the third wave came in massively. That is why it's very important to stay cautious in Africa: we are not out of the woods yet and, especially with the low level of vaccines, we need to increase testing. We need to also think of different strategies to move from 4% to 70% vaccination in one year. I think it's naive to think that that would happen easily. We also have to focus our energy on testing so that we identify and flush out those hotspot areas, and do something about them. We should also empower the community so that people can do their own tests in their communities and say: "Oh! I'm positive. I'll stay home rather than going to the market to shop and spread it there". That's the only way we are going to prevent these waves from coming again and again. Each time there is a wave, the continent loses 30 billion USD, whereas it doesn't even have enough resources. This money could strengthen health systems on the continent and enable all the national public health institutions to function, but now that's money lost.

Ibrahim Mayaki, African Union Development Agency: "The pandemic triggered the questioning of current governance systems in Africa" November 2021.

In this interview for INET's COVID-19 and Africa series, Camilla Toulmin and Folashadé Soulé discuss with Dr Ibrahim Mayaki, CEO of the African Union



Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) about how the effectiveness of State responses to COVID-19 in Africa have been very visible, and are leading to far greater public scrutiny of the public sector and prospects for better governance.

Dr. Mayaki of the Republic of Niger has been the Chief Executive Officer of the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) since January 2009. A former Prime Minister of Niger, from 1997 to 2000, Dr. Mayaki set up the Analysis Centre for Public Policy in Senegal in 2000. He was a guest Professor at the University of Paris XI (2000-2004). He went on to serve as Executive Director of the Rural Hub, based in Dakar, Senegal, before taking up his current position.

In our discussions with African leaders and thinkers so far, many see the COVID pandemic as laying bare the weaknesses in current economic structures and relationships, and that Africa's COVID recovery offers a starting point for doing things differently. Do you agree, and what lessons do you take from the COVID crisis for changes in Africa's future economic direction? What has to change?

My first point is that such views have a certain truth. However, it also has to be put in perspective. It is true that, due to COVID-19, Africa has known its first economic recession in the last 25 years. It is recognised by multilateral institutions that generally, we had good economic growth rates and well-designed macro-economic policies in most cases. We were doing quite well and sustainability of debt in the pre-COVID period was fundamentally not an issue. However, there were some red flags for certain countries to be more careful, but overall, the situation was not alarming.

The second point is that the economic model we have been following is a consequence of structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 90s, and which has not been sufficiently inclusive. We still are the most unequal region in the world. Inequality and youth unemployment are very important issues. The median age in Africa is 19 years and every year we have about 20 million young people coming onto the job market, but only 12 million jobs are created, and these are mainly in the informal sector. So, inclusivity was not the characteristic of that growth but nevertheless, we did grow. The COVID-19 pandemic accentuated existing fragilities, which you can see mostly in the social sectors – education, health, etc. – and we hadn't invested sufficiently in primary health care. Evidently our capacity to respond to the pandemic was weakened by this limitation. We really need to

take primary health care more seriously. Before COVID-19, we had 34-35 million children out of school and evidently this has increased with the pandemic. Pre-existing fragilities have been worsened during the COVID period.

The third point, to which we don't give sufficient importance, which is happening as a consequence of the pandemic, is a questioning of the governance systems we have had till now. Why? The pandemic created a situation where governments face public opinion and public scrutiny directly, and the effectiveness of the solutions they are promoting can be gauged immediately. If you supplied sufficient masks or not, it was seen. If you had sufficient diagnostic tests, it could be seen. This efficiency of the State was immediately visible and sensed by the population. It created a dynamic evolution where trust in public institutions has been reinforced in places where the response has been positive, or severely damaged because the response was not there. This is the most important facet from which will come a new economic model. Till now, governments and States had the monopoly of designing public policies. COVID-19 has led to communities becoming more pre-eminent, so we will likely see more co-creation of public policies. If it happens well, it will allow a reform of the economic model. If it doesn't happen, we may see violent changes in certain parts of the continent.

The pandemic has shown the many advantages of coordinated collective action by African institutions, international institutions like the WHO, the World Bank and African governments, in addressing the health crisis early on and looking for financing. What are the key preliminary lessons that can be derived from this collective action and exercise of African agency for the future?

The first important point is that Africans could give concrete substance to the concept of regional integration. We have been promoting, discussing and reflecting on African integration through investment in physical infrastructure, but in this particular situation and in response to the pandemic, we could see an immediate reaction based on regional integration. You will remember that all the Ministers of Health met in Addis Ababa as soon as the pandemic started in February 2020. We had an organised and structured African Centre for Disease Control

(CDC) and they drafted a roadmap which was immediately implemented in all countries, with the CDC outlining what needed to be done; for example, how to collect and report data et cetera. At the African Union level, we started putting in place mechanisms for the procurement of personal protective equipment, and diagnostics, and began thinking about a vaccine even before the COVAX system started. So, the content and purpose of regional integration in that domain were clearly understood by Africans and that has been one of the big lessons of the crisis. We realised we could use the same kind of approach in other domains beyond the immediate health issues. It also opened new reflections for African institutions. The World Bank, IMF, and EU have been helpful by accompanying us, without getting into the detailed discussions and decisions that were led by Africans.

The second lesson is this - most of the time when we design public policy, we bring our ideas and co-construct with donors and partners. However, this time we didn't co-construct in this way but moved out on our own path which gave a real, tangible sense to what regional integration could do. At the same time, it opened new pathways for reflection in a very concrete manner. Access to vaccines was a real issue so we quickly started talking about vaccine manufacturing and that raised the question about broader manufacturing capacities on the continent. This concrete example has pushed us to reflect on the way we had been proceeding with regional integration. It is true that the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which was looked at rather theoretically by most Africans, even though it was a huge step forward, suddenly made sense. This is because it could enhance the creation of regional value chains, sharing lessons learned about manufacturing, especially from specific countries like South Africa which could produce and link to other parts of the continent. Regional integration became even more real, once we started looking at the global scene. What we saw was vaccine nationalism, and we saw that global solidarity always starts with national solidarity. That meant that we as a continent really had to count on ourselves. If we look at the numbers of vaccinated people today, we see that in many countries there is a surplus of vaccines and people are talking

about boosters. In contrast, in our countries, most people have not even had their first shot. So, there are economic questions about manufacturing, but there are also moral questions that need to be asked.

My other point is around vaccines and government behaviour. Some governments succeeded very quickly in getting vaccines accepted, while others couldn't convince their populations to get vaccinated, despite having access to various media sources and much more information than in the past. It is therefore interesting to ask why some governments succeeded and others did not succeed in this domain. We have a list of countries where there is a surplus and people are not queuing to get the vaccine, and other places where there is a deficit and people are very keen to be vaccinated. Communities have played a big role here. Generally, the ordinary citizen believes much more in their community and on the views of local groups than what the state and governments are saying.

African countries will not be able to achieve their ambitions for economic growth and structural change without access to energy. COP26 has been an important moment to discuss climate and the constraints this places on Africa's energy choices, but this is at a time when many countries are also discovering new reserves of oil and gas. How should fossil-fuel-rich countries navigate their future, given huge needs for energy on the one hand, and risks from stranded assets and climate change on the other?

Most western countries industrialised using fossil fuels and have benefitted enormously from them over the last 200 years, an era of explosive growth. Historically, Africa has been the least emitter of greenhouse gases, which are the principal drivers of climate change. This is nothing new. However, African countries have still made strong commitments to the Paris Agreement, in order to do their bit and contribute their part to the global goal of reducing warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. There is, on the one hand, a commitment to an international accord, but there is also, on the other hand, the sense that as we industrialise, we shouldn't make the same errors that others have made. We need "green industrialisation". But the problem is no one in the history of economics has gone through a process of green industrialisation, there is no

model. It will need the construction of a fundamentally innovative process, which requires transfer of technology. When African countries want to use gas to be able to industrialise quickly, there are some global institutions that are critical of this use of gas. But look at California, where their renewable energy supplies rely on gas for base-load power. Within our new economic model, we must think about what kind of transition we want to take. We should not be blinded by severe commitments because we still have 50% of our population who do not have access to energy. Our transition cannot be one that increases extreme poverty. It must not increase the burden on the most vulnerable. We should think of a green energy mix that can allow us to have a reasonable implementation of commitments and at the same time reduce extreme poverty, which has been rising during the pandemic. That's the way we should think about energy. We cannot reject coal. If you reject coal in South Africa today, you will significantly reduce people's access to energy, since coal remains central to the grid. Nonetheless, we should have a mix of energy sources, and think about the use of renewables in an intelligent manner, following a learning curve in coherence with reducing extreme poverty and achieving more inclusive growth. Otherwise, we will be doubly penalised because we fully implement commitments, which doesn't make sense. We need incentives to move towards green industrialisation.

Some initiatives associating with the private sector were launched during the pandemic, such as the mVaccination digital toolbox with Vodacom, Mezzanine and NEPAD. How do you assess the impact of such joint initiatives? Do you think the African private sector has been involved enough during the crisis? What lessons can be derived for the future?

There are some critical issues here. First, if you look at indicators of innovation and levels of expenditure in R&D in Africa, it is mostly driven by the private sector. Sometimes governments create an ecosystem that allows the private sector to be much more innovative. It happens in Kenya and some other countries. Innovation comes from the private sector, and if governments want to implement innovative solutions, they have to partner with the private sector. That's the spirit with which we went into our partnership with Vodacom, MTN and

now Orange for the mVacciNation solution so we could tap into the innovative capacity of the private sector through these partnerships. We found a very receptive private sector to engage with, not only the big ones like Vodacom but also a full range of start-ups that are emerging from countries across the continent and have enormous energy in terms of innovation. So, this is the context in which the governments are working. Some have pushed in a resolute manner in the creation of an ecosystem that can let these innovative institutions emerge. Some haven't done it at all, but this hasn't prevented these actors rising up.

We realised that we could as a development agency of the African Union create very concrete partnerships with private entities. The receptivity of many governments has been very high because they realise they need to facilitate quicker, accelerated vaccination programmes, get the data on how vaccination is going, and then correct and adapt it based on feedback. This is one of the lessons which can be drawn from the pandemic. The behaviour of central governments has been shaken because they have discovered two things: they recognised their weaknesses and two, they have at the same time understood that there are many innovative ideas happening, structures, products and systems from which they can benefit. But in order to do so, they need to partner with business, which demands a fundamental mental shift. Most civil servants in African countries do not have a private sector culture, so their ability to link with them is somehow limited.

We need to create a space where there can be intercultural interaction between government and business, which allows this partnership with the private sector to flourish. We also have decided to promote this, and we have an initiative called 100,000 micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. We know most employment in Africa is in the informal sector - 80% of those employed in Africa are in the MSMEs, and the pandemic hit them very seriously. Our idea was to create a digital platform supported by financial institutions – we have a partnership with ECOBANK and accompany them in managing the financial and institutional stresses which the pandemic has brought. We created a Digital Academy and a digital platform to allow them better access to finance. Why a Digital Academy? To allow them

to move from informal to more formal structures. This partnership with the private sector helps shape and change the behaviour of our states and governments culturally and structurally too. I like the work of Mariana Mazzucato very much, and her book *The Entrepreneurial State*, which describes an approach that is greatly needed in many of our countries.

As a former Prime Minister of your country Niger, and President of the Sahel and West Africa Club of OECD, we must ask you how you see the future of the region. Ten years on from the overthrow of President Gadhafi of Libya, terrorist and jihadist groups have embedded themselves very firmly in much of Mali, and parts of Niger and Burkina Faso. Neighbouring countries, like Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal, are increasingly concerned with spill-over. Military solutions don't seem to be working. What political and economic measures could bring a better result?

The first thing the political elite in the Sahel must do is to recognise that they are the principal people responsible for this situation with the jihadists. That's absolutely fundamental. If you think that jihadism is just an import from elsewhere, and the consequence of the extremely negative NATO intervention in Libya - while this does play a role, it is not the main cause of jihadism. If you say it's the acceleration of the influence of particular religious figures, or Middle Eastern countries which have established radical religious education networks, if you believe this you are way off the mark. You are not facing reality. The reality is that our governments in the Sahel have completely neglected the territorial dimensions of planning and implementation of development. If you put two maps of the Sahel one on top of the other, you see those areas where the government has been active to improve health and education, and compare with those areas where jihadism is rife, you realise they have grown in those locations where the government has been absent. We need to recognise this as the elite.

Moreover, our response cannot be based exclusively on military intervention. The response must be the presence of the State in those zones that feel they have been completely abandoned. Evidently, the presence of the State currently demands a military

presence, but the military by themselves are clearly not enough. The fundamental question for the Sahel is the re-establishment and re-founding of the State. There is a lot of writing and literature on this subject, but the re-foundation cannot be done by elites based in ministries in capital cities. Let me give you an example. When I was Prime Minister, we launched a survey before an exercise in national planning to see what the population really wanted. We asked the population of Niger about priorities for health, water, roads, education, health, and so on. Astonishingly, what came top of the list as the priority across the country, was not water, health or education, it was justice. It was a system of justice that was equitable, accessible, and not corrupt. They needed this to live their lives with dignity. In this context, you see that a military solution cannot provide all the answers. Clearly, if you have people with Kalashnikovs, you need people on the other side who also have Kalashnikovs. Given the evolution of the conflict, there are people who are now drawing a livelihood from these criminal activities, which have nothing to do with jihadism. It is easy to recruit young people at US\$2 to \$3 per day who become kings and lords in their own right when they hold a Kalashnikov.

We need to rethink the presence of the State. The army cannot sort out the problem. What we need is the State to be present in a decentralised, locally rooted form. This demands the presence of public services, and engagement with local communities in deciding what is to be done. The State has to be decentralised. It is a new way of thinking. If we don't go in this direction, we will follow the route of Afghanistan – many billions spent and nothing to show for it. States must be present and make difficult but necessary choices in budget expenses. They should no longer prioritize the functioning of ministries that have no capacity to deliver anything in practice. We must help to construct local communities themselves who can then become a rampart and defence against the jihadists. Unfortunately, this essential shift in approach is not well enough recognised and understood. Instead, we see the multiplication of military actions and the corresponding spread of jihadist and terrorist groups. Too many international actors also participate in the illusion that this is the way to make progress.

Changing course won't be easy. It will be slow and long, but we must follow the right road. We must renew the State, decentralise our budgets, and reinforce community-based actions so that people can judge for themselves if they are better off under the aegis of the State or that of jihadist groups. This should be our aim for the medium and longer-term. At the OECD Sahel and West Africa Club, we are trying to create space where people from a wide variety of backgrounds can meet, in what we call the *Concertations sahéniennes* to ask the real questions and co-construct policies and solutions with actors on the ground.

Winnie Byanyima, UNAIDS, “We need to learn from the fight against HIV /Aids-and its mistakes-to tackle COVID-19”, March 2022

In this interview, Dr Folashadé Soulé and Dr Camilla Toulmin discuss with Winnie Byanyima – Executive director of UNAIDS and a CGET



(Commission for Global Economic Transformation) commissioner. Before joining UNAIDS, Ms Byanyima served as the Executive Director of Oxfam International, and she was elected for three terms and served 11 years in the parliament of her country, Uganda.

In the two years since the pandemic started, what is your perspective on how the COVID pandemic has affected inequalities globally and especially in Africa?

It's two years since the pandemic broke, and I'm very worried about the state of multilateralism – the world has failed to come together to solve this big global challenge. In the first year of the pandemic, the world was racing to find a solution. And we were all asking - can we find a scientific response to this virus? We saw even then that despite rich countries putting a lot of money into finding a vaccine, this would not solve all the problems. Past experience, especially from work on HIV

treatment, tells us that a vaccine can be found but the question of distribution - to reach everybody - would be a big one, too. We started to campaign for what we called the “people’s vaccine” even before the vaccine was found, because we knew from HIV that it took almost 10 years after antiretrovirals were developed for them to become accessible to people in the South. Meanwhile, 12 million people, mostly in Africa, died needlessly. The antiretrovirals were putting people back to health, to live normal lives in the rich countries, but people in the South were dying. We knew something like this would happen for COVID, so we started to tell leaders to put in place a plan for the distribution of these vaccines, and give a temporary waiver so that any country can replicate them without being liable to a court case. We also wanted a plan in place for sharing the technology, so that manufacturing can take place across the African region.

Today, the virus is still ahead of us, because a handful of companies have monopolized the technology and cannot meet the global demand for this vaccine. We’re seeing a big failure of global leadership to come together, and put in place a plan. We’ve seen targets for 2021 come and go. By the end of the year, 40% of the world should have been vaccinated, but we missed it. Now they are saying by the middle of 2022, 70% of the world should be vaccinated. But we will miss it again at this rate. That’s because governments have taken a backseat, and will not ask their companies to share the technology, although they have received a great deal of taxpayers’ money. I’m seeing a global crisis, with huge consequences, mostly for Africa, which is the least vaccinated continent. African economies have been shut, half-open, and shut again, bringing massive layoffs in key industries, which were producing for the rich countries. Look at the flower industry in Kenya, and the tourism industry there. They’re decimated, and you see something similar going on across Africa. Where we are part of global supply chains, we have been hurt terribly.

We also see that even when we got the vaccine and Africa was at the back of the queue, trying to pay for them, in the midst of a debt crisis. Many African countries are already failing to make debt repayments, and some are in debt distress. The international solidarity should have been there to get us all out of the crisis.

While there was some relief to postpone the repayments for two years or so, it wasn’t enough, it wasn’t deep enough to enable countries to get themselves back on their feet. We saw a lack of solidarity on financing, and it’s clear the global rules that don’t work for the majority of people. These global rules are not changing because the international system can’t come together and do the right thing for people. Many governments we call democracies have been captured by big money, they are not working for ordinary people. What are those global rules? I mentioned the trade rules at the WTO. We have a resolution from South Africa and India asking for a waiver. Many countries are coming round to this, even the United States, but the UK and Germany who host these monopolies are not coming on board. Trade rules need revision to see how to incentivise innovation, and at the same time guarantee access to medicines for all. Look at the global financial system, as another example. We all agreed to issue special drawing rights, but most of them go to help the richer countries and very few go to developing countries. We have a financial system that’s skewed against developing countries, it does not help to resolve shocks of this kind, and leaves the poor vulnerable.

We have tax rules that favour those who hold capital. There are many resources in Africa that could be taxed, but what should be taxed is not taxed, and is sent off to tax havens through an elaborate set of loopholes that are legal. That’s tax evasion. Countries can’t collect the revenue they need to deliver services for their people. We see a crisis in the global rules, which don’t work for the poor countries, for the small person, for the ordinary person. Whether it’s the pandemic or the climate crisis, we need to reorder the global rules. But it’s not easy to reach agreements on this, even when we see a calamity ahead. Looking at the longer term, I feel pessimistic. Maybe in the short term, we might get some relief from this pandemic because Omicron is so mild, and it has spread to more than 90 million people. This means many people are getting some immunity against it, but we cannot be sure that the next variant won’t be more lethal. It is still very uncertain, and African countries are still sinking. They don’t have the money to pump into the economy, such as the stimulus packages we see in the rich countries.

What has been the role of UNAIDS during this pandemic? Where do you see the links between the fight against HIV/Aids and COVID-19?

There are several positive things we have learned, including some mistakes, from fighting HIV/AIDS, which apply to how you fight any other pandemic. One of them I have mentioned is access to the solutions that science brings. We learned the hard way that unequal access to antiretrovirals cost us millions of lives. We should never repeat that mistake. We must make sure that when there's a scientific solution, we immediately make it available to everybody and find ways to incentivise the innovator. Right now, there are two or three companies that own the mRNA technology, and their leaders have become billionaires. One wonders how many billions would make them happy! This would be the time to share the technology.

The second lesson we have learned is that a global pandemic affects everyone. It doesn't respect borders, so you have to find a global solution. This is what happened with HIV. The world came together and made a global plan, set global targets and put resources behind them. A global problem needs a global solution. UNAIDS is a Joint Programme to fight HIV/AIDS. It has global targets, we set them every five years, we study the pandemic, and we monitor how the world is progressing. We know where the gaps are, what needs to be done, and those who can afford to pay more. But with this COVID pandemic, two years on, there's no global plan. The UN Secretary-General has called for one, but nationalism has come in the way of finding a global solution. The HIV pandemic still doesn't have a vaccine or a cure, but within that frame, out of 37.7 million people with HIV, we have 28.2 million who are on treatment and living healthy lives. We have 9.5 million who, for many reasons, cannot access the benefit of the science that's available, the ARVs, but we have a global strategy. This is completely missing for the COVID19 pandemic, and without it, this virus will always be able to mutate in some part of the world, become a more lethal variant, and come back to attack the world.

The third very important lesson is that a pandemic is not just a medical or health issue. It is about inequalities, because it moves along the cracks of the inequalities in society. If you don't close those cracks, it doesn't go away.

That is what we have learned and that's why we have a "whole-of-society" approach to fighting HIV. It's never just about giving somebody some tablets in a hospital. No, it's more than that. It's about human rights and closing the gaps in access to human rights for people, those who are underground. We have to look out for them and fight for them to enjoy their rights, to come forward and get treated, such as gay men, sex workers, or transgender women, they need to come forward to get their treatment. They must enjoy their human rights. It's a legal issue.

If you look at these travel bans on Africa, they are so senseless, and are not based on science. I call them racist, actually, because they're not helping anybody to protect themselves. Rules and policies are often not based on the evidence of science, so we have to work with legal frameworks to enable collaboration, cooperation, and freedom....

The COVID19 pandemic also raises many economic issues, as we have seen. We have learned that the health of economies and the health of people are tied tightly together. When you apply public safety measures, they have an impact on the economy. How do you optimize and get the right mix? We must bring economists and social scientists into the equation of finding a solution for a pandemic. We saw some countries that got it right, that were able to put together multi-sectoral teams. Many others either securitized the issue and had it handled by people from the military, or who made it a medical issue and placed it in the health sector and ignored all other aspects.

But most of all, it's about communities, about people taking charge and protecting themselves through prevention, treatment, and testing. It's about empowering people, and taking the services to them – we can see this is the quickest way and the shortest way. These are some of the lessons we have learned from HIV and which apply in the fight against Covid with some success. We must get better at the global level, to learn from our experience.

Could you highlight some positive examples of work and innovation by NGOs and civil society during the pandemic, and how might we build on these?

Yes, I'll give you an example from South Africa. This is one country that has been hit hard not just by HIV/AIDS but also by COVID. After a

period of denial, they got behind a strong strategy to fight HIV. South Africa has the largest number of people living with HIV in the world and they have made some of the greatest gains against HIV in the last 10 years. One thing they have done is to empower communities to take charge, so when COVID hit, the entire infrastructure from the battle against HIV could kick-in. From the laboratories and the scientists, to the communities who are active in fighting HIV, they could work on both pandemics at the same time in smart ways. In South Africa, if you remember the early phase, before it penetrated into communities, the important task was to identify those with the virus, isolate them and prevent the spread of the virus. This work in South Africa was largely done by communities because they were already mobilized, trained, able to learn how to identify the symptoms, how to engage people and then offer them support.

The same community-based organizations that do campaigns about HIV prevention were now carrying the messages about protecting yourself from COVID, the sanitation, social distancing, mask-wearing – the same communities were taking this work on and delivering. South Africa has one of the best surveillance systems in the world, but the scientists don't work alone. They are able to detect new variants well ahead of most other countries, even though they get punished when they share their knowledge, as with Omicron. They work with people in communities who gather the data they need, to carry out their technical work. It's a partnership between them and community leaders, whom they have known for many, many years and who are trusted, as they have the skills to help with surveillance and collection of data.

There are many other good examples. For example, in some countries we were touched by stories of people living with HIV coming together and solving problems together. This time looking for solutions to COVID, they were afraid to go to health centres, to collect their antiretrovirals because everybody feared getting COVID, but at the same time they need to stay on their treatment. So they organized ways of taking a bicycle ride, to go collect their medicines, and then distribute to people in ways that limited contact, using digital technology to identify where people are living. Many of them don't want to be seen collecting

their medicines, they need the privacy because of stigma associated with HIV. They were very creative about supporting each other to keep people alive, as these are life-saving treatments.

We have many examples of defending human rights together. Sadly, it is often the case in society when there is a problem that doesn't have a solution, a scapegoat is found. And very often it has been the weakest, minorities, people living with HIV, but if they can come together, they can build this resilience, from fighting HIV, to defend themselves and claim their rights.

Many have called for the pandemic to be considered as an opportunity to “build back better”, and to improve the capacity to better prevent, detect, and respond to health emergencies. Do you see African governments using the crisis as a way to trigger a new health paradigm in Africa?

This is what has made me the most hopeful in this crisis. When the pandemic was spreading and we saw rich countries that have the means turning inwards, African leaders didn't look inward. Instead, they came together, understanding the weakness of the continent in the global economy, to access the vaccine, buying in bulk to use their market power to get fair access to the vaccine and medical supplies. They tried hard, and their efforts were partially successful. But they also realised that even with their whole big market, putting all their resources together, they were still being pushed to the back of the queue. Those with the strongest, sharpest elbows, the richest, were at the front of the queue, and even hoarding vaccines. So, African leaders were disillusioned and decided they must not be found in this situation again; when the next pandemic breaks, Africa must be in a stronger position. They have been working together on a strategy for manufacturing of health technologies in Africa. It is a serious plan that is already being implemented, with several countries building up capacity for mRNA technology. South Africa, Senegal, and Rwanda are in different stages. The leadership of the Continent is aware that this production must be for the whole continent, not just for one country. This collective action makes me a proud African, that we come to solve problems together. I want the world to learn from Africa about that, we have things to teach the rest of

the world, even though many in the rich world always think they have much to teach Africa.

For me, this is one important example of coming together and facing a problem together. The investments that have been made are serious and real. In South Africa, they are trying to build a plant that can make the same kind of mRNA technology as Moderna. If Moderna were to say “here's our technology, here's how we did it” they would reach a solution in the next two years. But instead, they'll take longer, it will be slower because of the monopolies. Africa has taken the right steps to secure its future for access to medicines. And, we need to make the AfCFTA work, Everything hinges on that agreement working, and being put into operation. I think Africa is ready for it now.

What will be the future of multilateralism after COVID? How to reform the system in order to make multilateral institutions more responsive?

I think that the multilateral system is paralyzed because these institutions were created long ago, in the political context of the time. Seventy years ago, the world was different. Since then, the world has changed a lot. We need to be bold about reforming the multilateral system so that it reflects the way the world is today and the principles that it was founded on, that every country is equal and human rights come first. Institutions like the international financial institutions need to be reformed so that they actually do what they were set up to do, which was to cushion the world from economic shocks maybe from a security threat or a climate threat, to help countries absorb such shocks and lift themselves up. But these institutions today don't do this - they are controlled by a few rich countries.

Reforming those institutions will take a political will, which will have to come from the rich countries - the European Union, United States, China, Russia, Japan. These countries must show willing to reshape the global system to solve economic, social and environmental problems. The institutions are there, but they do not function because the countries themselves don't respect the very rules that they made, whether that's the rules of war, or the rules of the economy. They have used their power in the international system to create rules that protect monopolies which put the right to profit before the right to health.

The multilateral system is dominated by the rich who want to protect the interests of a handful of capital owners. We have to look at the state of democracy in the world too. As I said earlier, rich countries and their own democracies have been changing, and are being eroded. The voice of interests is stronger than the voice of ordinary citizens in these countries which we call “liberal democracies”, and this has also influenced the culture of the multilateral system. The people who lead are not leading for ordinary people. They are leading for big interests. I always try to go to the root of problems, and I think people must organize to claim back their power, particularly on our continent which is seeing military coups left and right. Democratic deficit is everywhere. It is also for citizens in the United States of America and in Germany, wherever, to claim back their power, and push back special interests so that ordinary people can shape the rules.

I don't see this as just a problem where we have a dictatorship. No, it's everywhere. We need to work on democratization across the world. We need some movement towards finding a plan for future pandemics. We have some negotiations starting here in Geneva, which could be an opportunity to put in place what's needed in each country and then get effective coordination at the global level, then we would be better able to withstand a future pandemic. But if it just becomes a place to agree on access to information, so that those who have power can get your data and run off with it, to find solutions for themselves that they don't share with you, that just won't work. There is now a push towards giving WHO power to be able to move quickly, and get the information it needs in order to prevent a virus breakout becoming a global pandemic. This is good but it's not enough.

If you have a health system in collapse, which has become privatized as well, the majority of people can't even access basic services and you are not going to be able to fight a pandemic. That's not a structure to get you out of a pandemic. The right to health means giving people the right to health care across the world, and the right social protection. A pandemic means people and their lives are disrupted, uprooted and the poor suffer. Social protection is key, and needs to be there as basic to fight a pandemic. Around a formal

health system is an army of volunteers, of community health workers, or young people or communities working to connect people to the health system. Even with our fractured multilateral system, these are the sort of things that I think the world can make some progress on. That's why I'm here in this role to help member states to make progress. We may not be where we should be, but we can do a few things to push forward.

Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Africa: “Equitable COVID19 vaccine distribution is a very important issue of global solidarity” February 2021.

In this interview, Dr. Folashadé Soulé and Dr. Camilla Toulmin speak with [Dr Matshidiso Moeti](#), the World Health Organisation Regional Director for Africa - and



the first woman to occupy this position – on COVID-19 health mitigation strategies in Africa and the role of the [WHO Regional office for Africa](#), equitable access to vaccines, health policies African governments should adopt, and the future of global health governance. Dr Moeti is a medical doctor and public health expert, with more than 40 years of national and international experience. She has worked with the WHO Regional Office for Africa, where she has held several senior positions, since 1999. Dr Moeti has led a Transformation Agenda which includes improved response capacity to health emergencies like COVID-19 pandemic and Ebola virus outbreak. Dr Moeti also led WHO's “3 by 5” Initiative in the African Region, which aimed to expand access to antiretroviral therapy. Prior to joining WHO, Dr Moeti worked with UNAIDS as the Team Leader of the Africa and Middle East Desk in Geneva, with UNICEF as a Regional Advisor, and with Botswana's Ministry of Health in various capacities.

While the continent has been praised extent for taking early health measures to prevent the rise in COVID-19 cases, several African countries are now facing a second wave of infections and rise

in deaths from the COVID-19 virus and its variants. How do you assess and compare overall the mitigation strategies that were taken by African governments and communities to address the pandemic during the first and second waves?

The first wave saw the setting-up of our capacity to respond, starting from a situation that reflected the resource and capacity gaps of health systems in most African countries. We had one advantage: in many African countries, disease outbreaks are quite frequent and at the time that COVID-19 was starting, we were responding to an Ebola outbreak in the DRC. Most countries had put in place checking of passengers in airports, and some countries even had land and border checking points. So, it was adjusting something that was somewhat already in place to COVID-19.

In the first wave, diagnostic capacity was virtually non-existent for this coronavirus. Fairly quickly, two regional centres in South Africa and Senegal could start testing for this virus, and there was a lot of work done to set-up the basic capacity, buying the equipment, the supplies, and training people. This was established initially in the capital cities and then progressively expanded to other localities within countries so that at least they could detect the virus. Then followed the work of setting-up other public health interventions, capacity, and infrastructure. This was all done in the first wave.

There was work as well to set up basic treatment capacity. But there was a big concern around the lack of ventilators. If you look at the number of ventilators per capita in Africa, it is way below the number in many other countries. Procurement of basic equipment like that was quite a challenge. Putting in place access to oxygen was also a challenge as it is not very frequently found in African countries.

Then there was the process of getting the population informed, because they play a very critical role. I think we need to do a lot more work on this because at the end of the day, an outbreak like this starts and stops with people. It is important to find the mechanisms and platforms that are in place in countries to engage people immediately, get their input into what's being planned, and prepare

At the beginning there were many lockdowns.

Governments decided to use these measures, understanding that this would give them time to build up their public health measures. About half the countries put in place pretty comprehensive control measures. Others had partial lockdowns and border closures to protect themselves from imported infections. Restrictions in the beginning were, in some cases, drastic and there is not yet a lot of investment in social safety nets: if you are under lockdown, you can't go to your job, to the market, to earn your living. Helping people to be able to cope happened in some middle-income countries and in some low-income countries. But for the future, safety nets really need to be built into all resilience measures, so that health systems can continue providing services despite the pandemic. One of the lessons learned is the importance of social safety nets given high levels of poverty in the region.

So how do you think these measures can address the second and maybe third wave that is hitting the continent harder than the first wave?

This is a virus where we're having to learn all the time about new clinical manifestations. Therefore, countries' systems need to be pretty nimble in updating their approaches. We have to update the guidance so that everybody knows that people with this disease, not only have lungs unable to function because of inflammation and therefore need oxygen, but that you can get many other manifestations that require different treatments, such as anticoagulants. You have to be able to adapt pretty quickly.

We're seeing in a few places, like South Africa, a very elevated case fatality rate, partly to do with increases in case numbers and partly to do with the capacity of the health system. We also need to understand the role of new variants in terms of severity of the disease. So far, our understanding has been that new variants of the virus are more transmissible. It does not necessarily lead to more severe manifestations of the disease or higher mortality rates, but we definitely need to understand the virus more. One key aspect of the second wave is that it is coming in the context of the necessity of opening-up economies and reverting to some sort of normal life around economic activity and education.

We are also seeing fatigue on the part of the population to carry on with these measures of wearing a mask and keeping a distance, after such a long time. Where I live here in Brazzaville, what seems to be happening on the street, in the supermarket, in town, is the challenge to sustain people's efforts at the individual level. It's very visible that people are tired: more and more people on the street are not properly covering their nose and mouth. More and more people are not even wearing a mask at all. One aspect that needs to be reinforced is research into what people are feeling, and thinking. What problems are they encountering in sustaining this, because we cannot assume that every household is able to buy a mask and keep buying and washing them - when they sometimes struggle to have water in the house to cook food and for people to drink. More needs to be invested in understanding what's happening with people and helping them to sustain these efforts. We talk a lot about a "whole-of-government" approach. There is a need for the different sectors to be talking to each other, to see where to strike a balance between opening-up, enabling people to go to work by public transport, and making sure that this happens safely.

We are not only dealing with the second wave, but we're also making sure that Governments and partners in the private sector are able to provide other health-care services for people that have taken a big hit. Family planning, lots of unplanned pregnancies, all sorts of illnesses, HIV treatment, chronic treatments, even child immunization have all dipped. There is a need to sustain public health measures and reinforce them further. Then of course, very importantly we must work on preparing for and delivering the vaccine. It's going to be challenging to do all of this at the same time, but we must help countries find the most appropriate ways of sustaining all of this.

Something that has been very positive in Africa is the work coordinated by the African Union in which we have participated very actively. We co-chair the steering committee of the Africa CDC that is mobilizing African action. At the sub-regional level, like the Southern African Development Community, we have also addressed some of the cross-border risks of transmission and developed protocols for transport and travel of people.

Some doubts have been cast on whether the African continent has been less exposed to the pandemic. Some news outlets suspect the number of COVID-19-related deaths have been under-reported, and that the actual number of deaths might be much higher. Antibody testing results from Nairobi, for instance, show a higher rate of people infected by the virus than the official figures. Based on the information that you have in hand, what do these studies tell us about the real infection rates? Does it for instance mean that a high number of infections have gone under the radar, due to a lack of testing, and that there are many more asymptomatic cases than we think?

African countries faced several issues in responding to the pandemic. One of the biggest challenges was due to distortions in the global market for certain supplies, including difficulties in obtaining all the equipment needed to do testing in a sustained way. It needed us in WHO, for example, to set-up a global platform with UNICEF and other agencies, to pool the money and procurement process, particularly for low- and middle-income countries.

Testing has been a challenge. About 18 low-income African countries have never been able to test at the level that WHO recommends of 10 tests per 10,000 people, because they don't have the supplies. Some countries, for instance, tried to use testing machines from their tuberculosis programmes. And Governments in some of the countries where the companies that produce these kits are based, prohibited exportation of the kits.

Some of the antibody studies coming out now indicate that in some places the virus has been circulating at higher rates. Even the ability of countries to get out there and detect asymptomatic cases has been challenging. So, certainly there's an underestimation of the cases we think, and probably also the mortality rates. In some countries they have undertaken testing post-mortem to see if there's a correlation.

However, with influenza we have a proxy indicator with some of the same symptoms as COVID-19, so our influenza surveillance will pick up many, many more cases than initially. We have had that going in a few countries. But it does not indicate that there's a massive number of African people dying. Speaking as an

African, not as a public health official, we know that death in African communities is a significant event. I think we would have been able to detect if there was a much higher mortality rate. In our reporting of cases, there is certainly a rising number of infections, which is no doubt an underestimation of the situation because the testing has been so problematic in many countries.

The continent is also facing a vaccine shortage compared to other continents. Vaccines are being secured via the COVAX initiative and shipment is progressively being carried out. But African policymakers and health experts are urging for more equitable distribution in a context where some vaccine producers are facing shortages and some developed countries are being accused of "vaccine nationalism". How can an initiative like COVAX ensure not only that vaccines are secured but also equally distributed to developing countries in such a challenging context?

This is a highly complex and very important issue of global solidarity which I can only describe as work in progress. First of all, I think that setting-up COVAX was learning from the past. In the past, with the avian influenza pandemic, acquiring supplies late was a real disaster. By the time African countries got those supplies, the outbreak was over. So having the forethought to set up a platform for procurement, based on global solidarity is a very good start which progressively will work better. COVAX has engaged both high-income countries, as well as the low-income countries that are eligible for support, and middle-income countries.

We need to understand that as long as you get delays in improving the situation in one part of the world, you will always have to keep your own economy semi-locked, by restricting movement, and interactions. So, it should be a win-win situation if there was some rational way of sharing the disadvantage equitably between countries. We're not there yet.

Those countries that have reserved supplies in advance to cover their population multiple times are now hitting the brick wall of production capacity. Companies that promised to deliver at a certain rate just don't have the capacity, and they're getting into quarrels with their clients, who are restricting access to others, which is something that had been

agreed in principle would not happen.

I think we have a lot of lessons to learn from this experience. My own position is to say, let us observe this unfortunate tendency, let us comment on it and regret it. And then let's find a way of helping African countries to get on with planning and delivering the vaccines that they can obtain, acknowledging that all the effort in developing vaccines, delivering and rolling them out worldwide at such a speed was hyper ambitious.

We also need to give ourselves a reality check, so we manage expectations, the frustrations, the emotions, and help everybody to focus on the task at hand, which is to develop a plan to the best of your ability to what you must do as a government, to be in an absolute state of readiness and engage with your role.

Each country has a vital role to play: if we were to put money into a common pot, I think it is for donors to contribute what they can, but I think it's also for our countries to go looking and contribute to the degree that they can, because it also gives them more of a say in the process, a sense of agency. I've been very encouraged by the position coordinated by the African Union and African countries in looking for financing, including for soft loans in a partnership with Africa Ex-Im Bank and the World Bank to engage suppliers. We're working with them to make sure that it works in a synergistic way with COVAX so we're not competing for the same suppliers and vaccines.

We have to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has become an acute political issue in all countries, and sometimes, becomes a party-political issue. Some want to be seen to be doing the best for their own people, which can weaken engagement with the principle of global solidarity. There has been a lot of work in COVAX to promote donation of early supplies from some high-income countries. We're talking, but it's often not translating concretely into actions. All I can say is that it's a strong principle to pursue. We must work on it practically and I'm hoping that the next time something like this happens, that Governments will be able to explain to their own citizens: while we may be wealthy, we have seen lots of people dying elsewhere, so let's deal both with ourselves and with the rest of the world.

Considering that the pipeline for access to vaccines will become more secure over time,

another challenge that many African countries will be facing is that of local willingness to get vaccinated. Some leaders have said that community engagement is key in this process. Afrobarometer, has been conducting surveys lately on the perceptions of African citizens of their government's response to COVID-19 and on their interest in getting vaccinated. First outcomes of the survey showed that in Liberia, for instance, 66% of respondents said that they were somewhat unlikely or very unlikely to get vaccinated and only 20% trusted the government to make sure the COVID-19 vaccine is safe. Results from other countries will follow but given the historic distrust towards vaccines among large parts of African populations, what are the policies and actions to be carried out for better community engagement?

I think that's a very important aspect of the work that needs to be done now. It really requires ways of engaging communities that are based very much at the grassroots, the networks, and groups that they associate with. Organizations, such as churches, religious leaders and networks, women's groups. We must work with these groups, their leadership, get their engagement and work through them and find ways to simplify the message and provide people with this information. We need to base this on recognising that you're bringing your most precious family members to line up for the vaccine. It's about helping people to ignore some of the messages at the beginning of the pandemic about Africans being used as vaccine Guinea pigs, for something that they would not benefit from. We saw the same problems while dealing with Ebola outbreaks. We need to find the appropriate and correct way to get the messages across through the right channels.

Before we wrap up, many have called for the pandemic to be considered as an opportunity to "build back better". How can African governments use the crisis as an opportunity to invest in better health policies?

There are many things that we have learned. First of all, there is a need for more investment in health. If we look on average across the continent, investment in health in Africa is still too low. What's the most effective way to invest your money so that you have resilience in building up your system? Rather than needing to appeal to the international community in a crisis, to put in money for you

to deal with an outbreak, it's important to build this resilience into your system by progressive investment in those parts which are going to help you to be able to deal with a crisis. The risk of an outbreak, the ability to detect it early and contain it are key. It speaks to investing in key components of your health systems, and then making sure that they deal with the risk of pandemic outbreaks at the same time as delivering health care for people with HIV, diabetes, chronic diseases, immunization for children, and so on. We pay a lot of attention to external funding, and emphasise the money that we are getting for HIV from the Global Fund, for vaccinations from GAVI. Very often putting these resources together in a way that works most efficiently is a challenge. There are lots of inefficiencies in this approach to health investment.

Secondly, on scaling-up the reach of essential health services so that you have not just primary care for treating diseases but are able to detect an outbreak; these basic investments in the peripheral system and in the different components of a health system are important. One of the lessons we've also seen is the potential of information technology, to get over some of the distance gaps in our systems, so that it's not necessary to be physically present - you can work through e-health. For instance, you can pass on information, improve your surveillance pretty quickly, collecting and analysing data so you know better what's going on.

African countries have to invest more in human resources across different competencies, including making sure there are enough nurses, and for them to have a decent working life - to take time off and be trained properly. This is also true for doctors, and other professionals. We need to look at the interface between animals and people, working on agriculture, animal health, human health, exchanging data on disease, so that when there's an outbreak of a certain type, starting among animals, that there is an appropriate response.

We must also work across sectors. We have seen with the COVID-19 outbreak that you need to be looking at risks to do with water and sanitation, and being able to control access to water for hygiene purposes, which has been a big challenge in some African countries. We should pay more attention to accountability,

including social results, in terms of support from donors and what we do with our own domestic resources. Even if our continent is highly dependent on international support, as African countries, we should still spend more of our own money on health. I think that we could get more value for this investment, if we make the accountability system more robust.

Finally, I do think that there needs to be more investment in research and innovation in our countries so that we can develop indigenous African capacities.

The pandemic has demonstrated that multilateralism is key to address global challenges, but it has also showed that effective actions by multilateral organisations can be hindered by politicization by some of its member states, and internal constraints for organisations like the WHO, such as insufficient funding. How does this pandemic offer an opportunity for the reform of global health governance? And what will, in your view, be the future of multilateralism after COVID?

The pandemic demonstrated quite dramatically that multilateralism is challenged. If you look at the responsibilities and the role of the WHO, I think it has demonstrated that this should be a mutual responsibility; first, between WHO and Member States, and second engaging other key players who are working on other aspects of global health and global health security.

We need an architecture that enables WHO to play its role of leading, coordinating, and being custodian of the International Health Regulations. The rules need to be constructed in such a way as to enable WHO to carry this out. There should be clear definition of procedures, and sanctions, if Member States do not comply and also incentives: what would make you open your country up for scientists from outside to come in and examine what might be starting, before it blows out of control? Resourcing is also very important.

Other entities matter too. We've seen that the private sector's role in response to the pandemic has been absolutely crucial. If you look at the private sector's role in the development of key tools, vaccines, and so on, there's been a lot of negotiation. The idea of sharing intellectual property has been moving back and forth - some have embraced it and many have not. There are many lessons

learned from this experience that will encourage reflection.

One hopes that the global political situation will enable that to happen. As far as multilateralism is concerned, we know countries are very different in terms of influence internationally, so we need to find a balance between different countries. The multilateral system should facilitate greater equity and encourage more countries to invest their time and resources in these multilateral processes; to get a shared balance in influence between different regions, and continents. Our interconnectedness is our shared vulnerability, and the world is only getting more and more interconnected.

Vera Songwe, UNECA: "Let's build forward better!" October 2020.

In this interview, Dr. Vera Songwe, economist and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa reflects on the ways that African governments have handled COVID-19, the role of the Continental Free Trade Agreement in turbo-charging future growth, the vital role of infrastructural investment and mobilising domestic resources for building forward better and greener.



We'd be keen to get your reflections first on how African governments have performed in relation to the Covid pandemic, and then whether you think this might prompt a rethink of direction and strategy.

I think Africa's response has been quite strong and we should give credit to the fact that three things happened. One, Africa had the benefit of "coming last" and so got a little bit more time to prepare. The sheer fright of watching what was happening in countries whose health systems were meant to be much better than ours led to most (not all) of our leaders taking it seriously early on. We saw a lot of mass information campaigns, and handwashing campaigns very early in March. We didn't have any debates

about wearing masks, we just got on with putting them on. So that probably helped us quite a lot, especially given we have a culture and a society that meets a lot. We are social beings by definition. The other thing that helped was over 42 countries closed their borders at the peak, or what we thought was the Africa peak. We not only closed borders but also closed schools, markets and churches, and there were curfews in many countries, so there was no evening activity. All of that helped enormously to combat the disease, so by the time the huge wave was meant to come, we were ready for it and in various stages of lockdown. There were spikes but they were mainly controlled. Because it came a bit later to us, we were really prepared. The most important fact is that a lot of the middle belt of the continent has had over the last decade to combat one health challenge after another, whether it was SARS, polio, cholera, Ebola, or HIV so we had systems in many of those countries of local nurses, community-based systems, of churches which all pass on information, of people you could talk to who can reach out to educate others on the importance and dangers of this disease. The communication process, even if not perfect, was much better and we had systems already in place. Contrast that to North Africa where they haven't had any kind of recent health crises. North Africa has not yet come out of the pandemic, and there are still very high numbers, they have had great difficulties in managing it and been in continuous lockdown. Both North Africa and southern Africa lack the experience which the middle belt countries have faced on how to deal with it. Populations do not quite understand what health crises look like, and maybe even lack local health care nurses. This infection really requires community conversations and interactions. Of course, our demographics are another important element. COVID is meeting populations in Africa that are younger than those in other parts of the world, since the average age is only 20 years old. It is also being said that we have quite a number of asymptomatic cases, so we are not getting the severe clinical problems confronted in other parts of the world. For now.

While Africa may have been less affected in terms of death rates, the continent has suffered major economic impacts, such as inter-regional trade which has fallen to a low point. You have

been championing inter-regional trade and implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. How could the AfCFTA be a vector for Africa's economic recovery, especially in a context where many land and maritime borders are closed?

I have been quoted as saying that the AfCFTA is Africa's blueprint for reconstruction and I really mean that. I always cringe when people say Africa needs a Marshall Plan. We don't. We have the AfCFTA. If we now decide we want to implement it in the way in which it was designed, we have a huge turbo-charger for Africa's growth. For the CFTA to really work you'd need to put in place what I call all "the enablers" – the energy, roads, ports, communications infrastructure, and the ICT platforms. If you shut your eyes and imagined Africa putting all these things in place, the continent would be a huge construction site. Achieving 10-12% growth rates would now be possible.

In terms of trying to get this investment into enabling infrastructure, what balance of private and public money does this need? Everybody talks about the high risk of investment in Africa. What are your thoughts on how to get more investment into this enabling infrastructure?

We have launched something called the SDG7 Initiative working with the African Business Forum. It is exactly that. One of the things we have to do on the continent is understand the challenges, barriers, and constraints - perceived or real - that the private sector sees when they come onto the continent. Based on that, we need to structure a process or programme. In our SDG7 Initiative, we're saying we have now a stock of infrastructural assets on the continent that already exist. Somebody has already taken the construction risk, somebody has taken the borrowing risk, what we can now do is to offer these assets for re-purchase. It becomes a very simple purchasing operation. We can then return those resources to government which can now reinvest, and a different group of investors can take on this new construction risk, environmental risk and social risk. What this does is crowd in more capital, hopefully cheaper capital, and we can structure it differently. It's also quicker to try and put these deals in place. COVID has slowed things down and made it a bit more difficult but we're testing this as an experiment. If it works then I

think that it should bring a different class of asset-investors to the continent, because they're coming in to pick up finished assets as opposed to construction. The second thing we should do is around communicating as regards the concept of risk on the continent. A lot has been done but more is necessary. Part of the conversation should be around growing Africa's own businesses, because I don't need to tell Strive Masiyiwa about risk, or Ali Dangote or Naguib Sawiris. They know what they're dealing with and have billion-dollar investments. We shouldn't only focus on how to convince the British or Americans to come in, we need continuous support of our own investors, those Africans who have bet on Africa.

Does this also mean seeing how you can mobilise more effectively domestic sources of finance from within the continent, such as pension funds?

Yes, we're doing a lot of work on that right now at the UNECA, working with US pension funds. Two years ago, we took US pension funds to Senegal to meet with West African pension funds, and talk about how we could work on co-investment ideas. That does two things – the first is that it helps African pension funds learn about what US pension funds are looking for, but also how they make decisions about investment, and what kind of regulatory reforms are needed to crowd in more pension fund investment. So, we give US pension funds an opportunity to invest in good assets while we grow Africa's own pension funds. Several deals came out of that first visit to Senegal. We did a second visit to Kenya last year, with the same concept but involving East African pension funds this time, and a deal came out of that as well. We were meant to do another this year in Ethiopia, but with COVID we're holding off for the moment. We're trying to create a community of African pension funds, since there is a large amount of dormant resources, in the pension environment. The immediate benefit of using local pension funds is that you're borrowing in local currency, so you're not taking exchange rate risk. Instead of looking for blended finance from abroad, you can actually do it using your own financing. This makes your investments quite cheap and much more affordable. If it's your own country's pension funds, the maturity term can be much longer. Right now, Africa is usually

going to the market for 7 or 15 year money. But we need 30 year money. Continental pension funds are much better placed to give us 30 year money.

There have been many debates about debt forgiveness and restructuring, in the framework of the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI). China which is Africa's first bilateral creditor seems to favour a bilateral track for debt renegotiations, as we have seen with Angola. A few months ago, you organised a session for African Ambassadors based in Beijing on several topics. Is it possible for African governments to have a coordinated approach on the debt issue, say in relation to China, despite disparities in levels of indebtedness? And do you think this tension between bilateralism and multilateralism can be solved?

The two are related, and there will always be some tension between the two which to my mind can be positive. Tension creates competition. However maybe what we need inside that space is a lot more transparency. We need a level playing field for that competition to be more effective. When we talk about debt on the continent, we tend to talk about it on 16th street, in Paris, or at the G20. The people who need to know the most about Africa's debt are its citizens, and they need to know what those resources are being used for and how, since they are the ones who are going to bear the brunt of paying for it. We need a degree of transparency across the board. I don't think we can say today that any one of our institutions is more transparent than the other. Or anyone of our bilateral colleagues is more transparent than the other. As a matter of fact, we are trying to get all the data on Africa's debt to Europe and we are not able to find the data. We do actually know what the figures are for Africa's debt to China. The OECD DAC has been making a great effort but more needs to be done in this space. The president of the World Bank has come out quite forcefully behind this saying "let's all start doing it". This is also true for the private sector by the way. That's the first thing -to improve the transparency of the process.

On the bilateral and multilateral question, is Africa ever going to be able to come together to negotiate with China? My sense is that if we really wanted to, we could. The need has never been so important as it is today. However, because the crisis today has been so powerful,

it has unfortunately pushed people to become more independent and more focused on trying to solve their national problems. The interest payments to China are \$6-7b a year, so if we all came together, and said to China "lets discuss this as a group", we probably would have had a lot more impact. Discussing it individually, some people may benefit while others may not. In the end it may become suboptimal. China, like Africa, is also a recent player on the international scene. If we go back twenty years, this is where we were with Europe, until they decided to pull together and put in place a multilateral debt relief initiative. That's why we all got the same terms. I think that's what the G20 was trying to do with its announcement. However, it's difficult to do that when on the other side of the conversation we have all these discussions about representation in the different global institutions, and where voice is still a big issue. We can't solve these problems discretely, individually, we need to address how to bring new and emerging economies like China, India, South Africa, and Turkey into the mix.

The pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide by disadvantaging those who have less or no access to digital connectivity and technologies – thus aggravating the rich-poor divide. UNECA has worked together with the African Union Commission on the development and implementation of the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020–2030) and with the World Bank and other UN System Agencies to support the design and implementation of digital ID programmes. To what extent can further investment in digital infrastructure and digital skills development make the difference to Africa's economic recovery?

What is the potential of the digital economy in the next 20-30 years? Some say it could be \$47trillion. That's 20 times the GDP of the whole continent today. So the potential is quite amazing. When you then think we have the largest youth population in the world, you begin to see why there is great merit to having our continent totally digitalised and connected. COVID has shown us in the interim, digital transformation can generate increasing inequalities. Take me for example, I am talking to you, I can do this because of the bandwidth and energy I am using, which could probably educate another 300 kids somewhere. But they

don't have the access, the electricity, or the connectivity. We're working with UNICEF to get packages providing digital access which you could offer to communities, just to close the divide.

Everybody is so desperate to find success on the continent, but sometimes we over-celebrate our successes, or we celebrate it too early. Take M-PESA, the Kenyan mobile banking innovation. We were talking about M-PESA ten years ago, but M-PESA hasn't moved out of Kenya. That's maybe where the CFTA could come in and make sure these big national successes can cross borders, and move from being a Kenyan success to an African success. We must work on the regulation which would allow the transboundary success to be possible. When you look at the data only 17.8% of the continent's population actually has access to the internet. 740 million have cell-phones, and we celebrate that many women in rural areas have cell-phones – yes! – but that cell-phone doesn't allow her to do a lot. The difference between her cell-phone and mine is that I can access the internet, download the news and get anything I want within 3 seconds. And with 5G we'll maybe get it in milliseconds. But she cannot. Having a cell-phone in your hand doesn't make you connected to the digital age. If you look at 17.8% of 740 million you actually get down to 132 million, which is a much smaller number. Internet commerce on the continent is currently 5-8% of our GDP. Of this 8%, 5% happens in South Africa. So the continent is not there by any stretch of the imagination. We need a lot more work – that's the bad part.

The good part is that it's a field of investment, a field of dreams for people with ideas and resources, from which you can create jobs, and value. The development community has to come together and say, rather than giving social safety nets and food baskets, let's give someone a digital ID, or an iPad. Can we begin to bundle the services in a different way? The development community is still stuck on giving people a glass of milk – a glass of milk is great – and we are actually investing in a milk company in Niger because the child's brain nutrition is important. But maybe we need to be investing in both the child's brain and also their innovative capacity. Let's bundle those services differently.

Building on this and the importance of digital

going forward, a lot of people have been talking about how we must all build back better greener and the importance of a green recovery, for all parts of the world. How do you see that panning out in an African context? And what role do you see in the future for Africa's considerable fossil fuel resources?

On the first question, we in the UN system wrote the first report on Build Back Better, as part of our 75th anniversary celebrations. And we pushed it forward as part of the decade for action. However, Kristalina said the other day, you know we don't want to build back, we want to build *forward*. I may be going against my own institution here, but I think we should build *forward* better. In Nick Stern's report on sustainability and rebuilding and redesigning the new economy, he says the new green economy can create [\\$26 trillion of activity](#), and generate 26 million jobs. Africa can take quite an amount of that. We have done a report at the UNECA looking at Uganda's tanning industry and you can certainly do tanning better using less water, using sustainable natural colours, and by processing the hides and skins with a different kind of heat, you can save 40% of energy. There is a lot of work like that on the continent which shows how we can do things differently, like agriculture and food processing. These can increase productivity, such as the time it takes to dry coffee beans, moving from laying them on the street to using new solar power technology, which should reduce wastage. 40% of Africa's food is depleted due to poor quality of storage. With new technologies you immediately improve productivity, people's revenues and prosperity. I think there is a huge piece here that we can do. In Ethiopia where we are sitting, as you may have seen the Prime Minister has this huge project. Last year, he planted 2 billion trees, this year 5 billion, and the idea is that in a few years it will be 20 billion altogether, enough to change the ecosystem of the region and sequester a lot more carbon. We are accompanying them in that process, and asking: can we help women with cooking stoves in the rural areas of Ethiopia, by launching a series of clean cooking stove investments? This can give young men and women jobs in cook-stove production. But also 23% of Africa's women suffer from some form of respiratory diseases so that is also a way to fix that problem. There's a chain of nature-based solutions, which both create value and

improve the quality of life, in many cases quite cost effectively.

Let's look at transformation of the energy system. Maybe 35% of Africa's energy use is still based on fossil fuels, so we'll need to transform that into more renewable energy. The good thing for Africa is that we're so far behind, with half of the population without access to electricity, and $\frac{3}{4}$ of our industry without the right kind of energy. So there are huge new investments needed. That's the advantage Africa faces, we're still virgin, we don't have an incredible amount of stranded assets which you then need to convert. We just need new investment. There is an opportunity there. However, it's important that Africa's transition be as fair and equitable as possible. Some people say Africa should end fossil fuels tomorrow morning. Well... Germany is asking for 18 years to phase out coal. If you compare Germany and Angola, I think Germany has much greater capacity to phase out than Angola does. If Germany asks for 18 years, I think Africa needs the same kind of dispensation. I don't want Africa to do coal. But we do have gas, which is a transition energy and I believe Africa must be allowed to continue to invest in gas. It's much cheaper, and it helps the transition. This is not a formal UN position, though we are putting out a report with these findings, saying Africa needs to be allowed to continue with gas. The UK is doing new gas. The US is doing everything, and even going back into coal. We cannot deprive the continent of the use of gas over the next few years, as it makes this transition into cleaner and better energy, while we also find better ways of storing energy and bringing down the cost of renewables.

Our final question on "Building Forward Better": Crises can provide a window of opportunity, a moment of enhanced possibility, when it is easier to achieve large-scale change. Despite all of the suffering caused by the coronavirus, could it also be an opportunity for reform? Will economic globalization be different after coronavirus? And how?

I wish I had a looking glass! Two things have happened on the continent. There has been a lot of collaboration amongst Africa's leaders, finance ministers, and health ministers to try and understand and respond to the crisis in a collective way. We should carry some of that into the future. Some of this is also the result of

the CFTA, since there was so much continental momentum built around the CFTA. When COVID came, some of the institutions for those collaborations were already in place. Lots of Africa's institutions like the African Union have been reforming with South Africa's President Ramaphosa at the top, and others including Senegal's President Macky Sall. We have had a constellation of leadership which has made it work. This has demonstrated so well what can be done when Africa's leaders, citizens and civil society work together. I don't think we've ever seen such an extraordinary civil society response on the continent. This has just begun to show the possibilities of what can be done by leaders and civil society working together. There's always been a lot of healthy mistrust between them, the one for the other, which is still there because we need to keep a close eye on governance, but for once at least people have said we can work on this issue together. There is a really powerful new ecosystem which has been constructed and hopefully we can keep it. For example, for digital transformation, I think we could use civil society much more to enhance the digital agenda across the continent. Maybe this is the beginning of those foundations. We pushed for transparency and we didn't always get it, but in fact governments have been forced to report day by day on what is happening. The focus on transparency also shows which countries are reporting and which ones are not. Just with that data, you could take it and contrast it with the Mo Ibrahim data, and you would see who was most transparent, who was less, depending on where you've got good governance institutions. Let's just keep building on that. If you can report on COVID maybe you could report on your budget expenditures, and increase transparency on things like tax collection. There is now this infrastructure built which we could try to use. The big task with building institutions is making them resilient. Certainly there is some COVID fatigue across the world but clearly, the other thing which has come out of this is the resilience of our private sector. We launched a programme at UNECA with Africa's EXIM bank to see how we could support existing businesses to make sure they don't collapse. The other worry we had was that food prices might go up, so we thought about how we might increase agricultural production in a few strategic countries - Senegal and Guinea for

rice, and Ethiopia for wheat. We wanted to double production to keep prices down for fear of inflation. All of a sudden, we must have got a thousand businesses saying I could re-purpose my business for masks, or for PPE. One day we even had someone saying “we can do ventilators in a Volkswagen factory in South Africa” and now we’re looking to see if we can do a vaccine factory on the continent. Before the crisis we were importing over 90% of our drugs. Hopefully when the crisis is over, we will be down to 50%. Because the rest will be made on the continent. With these kinds of initiatives, if we can build them further, we can then progress a bit faster.

Fatima Denton, UNU-INRA: “Governments must accelerate a plan for a diversified economy, an exit from fossil fuels, and shift towards a green transition” June 2020.

Dr Fatima Denton is the Director of the United Nations University – Institute for Natural Resources in Africa ([UNU-INRA](#)) based in Accra, Ghana. She has



depth of expertise in natural resource management, as well as deep knowledge of research and policy development, and the African region. Prior to joining UNU-INRA, Dr. Denton worked with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in Ethiopia since 2012. Her roles included Director of the Natural Resource Management Division and Coordinator of the African Climate Policy Centre. Before that Dr Denton was a Programme Leader with the Canada-based International Development Research Centre (IDRC), where she managed high-impact action research, including a major climate change adaptation research programme managing over 100 action research initiatives encompassing 40-plus projects across 33 countries in Africa.

We’re taking the opportunity to listen to people who can provide direct testimony of how COVID19 is affecting different parts of the African continent, and then reflecting on what this crisis means for the choices African

economies face over the next 5-10 years. For you, in Accra, what are some of the more visible and less visible impacts of COVID19 on the city, Ghana and West Africa more broadly?

In terms of the visible signs in Accra, you can divide it into two phases. At the initial stage when it was all starting, and we were seeing two-digit numbers of those infected – we’re now in the hundreds – initially, while there was a sense of potential doom, no-one really took it seriously. The concept of “social distancing” was very foreign for people in Accra and Ghana more widely. But the commercial elite, especially the Lebanese shopkeepers, brought out the hand-sanitisers, and quite rapidly it became the new norm to wash your hands whenever you entered a shop. Ghanaians are compliant by nature, so everyone has complied with these new rules, while going about their normal business. However, once the situation became more alarming and border closures came into force, government slapped on a number of restrictions which ordinary people didn’t see coming, and then the mood changed. People began to take it all a lot more seriously, and Accra became like a ghost town – really quite something for such a loud and vibrant city! Streets were deserted, with hardly any traffic, and the shops were closed. You could only go and buy food, and there were police stationed at different parts of the city. There was a good sense of monitoring and compliance. In a few cases, people felt the police had been a bit heavy-handed on enforcement which was not well appreciated. So maybe we started with a humorous side to social distancing, but then people said to themselves “its here now” and people have really taken it seriously. It would feel almost criminal now to go out without a mask. Shops say “no mask, no entry”. When they partially lifted restrictions, we were all surprised, because we thought it a bit premature. Although government is doing a lot of testing and contact tracing, the bigger fear has been the economy, given the big impact on people and their livelihoods. People have a strong sense that they’re not just protecting themselves but protecting others too. There’s a real sense of greater public health awareness which I don’t think I have ever seen at such a scale.

In terms of food, farming and agriculture, what’s the picture? The rainy season must be beginning,

and farmers need to get ploughing and sowing. I heard in some places the worry that governments were blocking travel out of the main cities, to protect rural communities. But with so many young people away during the dry season on migration, do they face difficulties making their way back home to help start planting and weeding?

While both Accra and Kumasi have had partial lockdowns, there are not too many restrictions on travel, though buses have had to limit the numbers they take to avoid crowding. Food-wise, many Ghanaians grow a lot of what they eat. Prices are going up and I see more people begging, there are more street kids in evidence. Ghana already had a problem pre-COVID with people coming across the borders from Burkina Faso and Togo.

The government has done quite well in terms of safety nets offering cash and food. Everyone has been given 3 months' relief for their water bills, and a discount on electricity bills – not just for the poorest groups but across the board. Front-line workers like nurses have been given food supplies – rice and other staples. Government has actually done what it said it would do. Of course, you have to bear in mind this is an election year.

A number of analysts we have spoken to have emphasized that the pandemic is a really important moment for reflection to re-think development models, such as further regional integration, taking forward the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), strengthening local production, integrating the informal sector better, diversifying production, and so on. Given your particular focus on energy, natural resources and sustainable development, how does this moment look to you?

So much has already been said on this. There is a general narrative of “building back better” which many UN agencies and others espouse. And I do support this too, but I also ask – what is your point of departure? Certainly, we have to learn from this crisis. It's a useful analogue – call it a “dress rehearsal” - and metaphor for more resilient development. But if we were to come out of this and go back to where we were, that would be really foolish. Taking a natural resource perspective, African countries need to recognise being richly endowed with these resources does not by itself bring prosperity. There is even greater urgency today to start

Foresight Planning, which we talked about in the “stranded assets report” – it is even more urgent today. For oil reserves this is no longer a hypothetical question, its real. We are indeed in a situation of stranded assets, with oil prices near zero. Africa cannot put all its eggs in one basket. Some 70% of Africa's export revenue comes from oil, gas and the mineral sector. Governments must plan for a diversified economy, an exit from fossil fuels, and shift towards a green transition. This planning has to happen today, it should have happened yesterday. We can't go back to drilling and extraction, trying to make as much money as we can. Not only are these resources finite but there is low demand, which presents a big problem. On the flip side, there are many African countries who do not depend on these resources but who might be tempted to take advantage of what they see as cheap oil, and coal. Take the case of Zambia which is building coal-fired power plants because coal is there in abundance. There are also some countries in Africa who see that, despite the unfortunate situation, there are a number of new opportunities to tap into. Countries like Rwanda who are choosing to invest more in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), saying let's invest in our green sectors. Equally Ethiopia for a long time has had a Climate Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) growth and transformation plan, which has been very pioneering in many ways, especially in terms of their manufacturing.

So “build back better” depends on your departure point. Countries that start from a good departure point can reinforce their green ambition whereas others may be tempted back to rely on fossil fuels, because it is cheaper for them in the short term. The heightened indebtedness of many African countries today means some countries are going to be looking at cheap options, especially when it comes to energy. We're a continent which is hugely energy poor despite having rich quantities of renewable energy sources. For well-established oil producing countries, it is wiser to look at the alternatives, and see oil as having a short lifespan, with a strategy to extract for a certain period of time, based on a regional market which would help with demand. Most first-world countries are not going to increase demand for oil, so producers like Nigeria, Angola, and Tanzania with their big gas fields, might want to co-develop their regional

markets, to make sure they actually can receive some revenue from these resources.

With the “build back better” narrative, we must remember there are a number of structural global injustices already present: climate change in itself is a structural injustice. The path to a green transition could leave some people behind – hence the notion of a “just transition”. Take the informal sector which has been left on the periphery and hard hit by COVID19. The informal sector tends to be seen as an afterthought. So, let’s not superimpose one structural injustice on another.

In your blog and paper, you mention that African countries need to “manage the jump” to a low carbon economy, instead of being pushed. In the case of Ghana, they seem to have done well so far in managing revenues from oil and gas, and establishment of a sovereign wealth fund. How are they managing this?

Ghana has been re-deploying revenue from oil into providing the Free Senior High School Programme. Clearly the education sector has been crucially impacted by COVID19. There is a stark digital divide. Take the University of Ghana which looks like a ghost town today. Students must follow their lectures on-line, but many cannot afford to do that. Buying data is expensive. This is where governments could be more strategic, and invest revenues in better infrastructure, supporting schools, making sure students have the relevant equipment, and digital gadgets. My own son has 3-4 hours in the morning online and often in the afternoon as well – that’s a lot of connectivity, made even more difficult where you have a lot of power outages as well. Governments really need to see how to plough back resources into sectors like IT. Most of the IT companies are not Ghanaian – they’re the big global companies, continuing a history of unequal trade, similar to that of natural resources, built on predation. There are essential sectors which need to be indigenized, to level the playing field and bring in more Ghanaian players. Ghana has been very strategic in use of oil rents. Gas has a less well-developed market in West Africa, which needs shaping, and with the clear understanding that this is not going to be an open-ended extraction process. Rather the money should be used to diversify into manufacturing, education, and other critical essential sectors.

Would you say Ghana is one of those countries

for which oil has not brought the resource curse?

Only up to a point. A recent report by UNECA on illicit financial flows shows there are disturbing emerging trends here too, with significant capital flight, and a lot of money being laundered. You only have to walk in the streets of Accra to see many buildings being erected left, right and centre. Government is trying to do something about it, and comparatively speaking has done well so far.

I wonder what your thoughts are on the debt question. There has been a lot of discussion about whether African countries, given the COVID19 crisis, should be granted relief or a moratorium on debt?

There are clearly multiple levels of debt and liability. Take the extractives sector, where a number of contracts will have failed and concessions collapsed, given the big fall in oil and commodity prices. This will all bring litigation. There are many highly indebted countries in Africa, but we can also see that many rich countries will also come out of this crisis with very large public debts. Senegal’s President Macky Sall has been calling for debt forgiveness but there are persistent concerns that this money once forgiven might end up in the wrong hands.

Debt is also linked to the notion of a “just transition”. If you have industrialised countries in Europe which offer funding on condition that African countries follow a green economic pathway, it is as though African countries are being asked to pay the price for the current state of the global environment - but they are not responsible for this. A more balanced approach would involve helping invest in the infrastructure which would enable a green economic pathway. If funding always comes with many conditions, it feels like you give with one hand but you take with the other. It doesn’t seem right that industrialised countries demand payment for the climate crisis which is a huge injustice in itself. “Build back better” cannot be something that you just say yes to - you must think hard about what it means. Do not just copy others. With the COVID crisis, many countries just blindly copied what happened in Europe and Asia. But you can’t just repeat a slogan such as “Build back better”. You have to really believe in it, like in Rwanda and Ethiopia. It is your insurance policy since it builds a more resilient economy for tomorrow,

creating shock absorbers for the future.

What does a phase-out of fossil fuels look like? How could that work for a country like Nigeria and Angola, where oil runs through the veins of the economy and political system. What's a realistic timeframe?

It's harder for well-established oil-dependent countries like Nigeria and Angola. It comes with a perception of oil reserves being a sovereign right, which will be there for generations to come. For most, phase-out by 2030 is too short. The African Union's Agenda 2063 doesn't talk explicitly about stranded assets, but it proposes two phases, the first of ten to fifteen years and then a periodic monitoring. African countries need to be looking at a 30-50 year time frame, during which a deliberate process to phase-out and diversify makes sense. It would be foolish to phase out right away and they can ill-afford this. This pandemic has meant Nigeria had to revise its economic forecasts very substantially, as it has seriously affected GDP. There is a huge opportunity for Africa to look at new energy resources, such as becoming the main supplier of Hydrogen to industrialised nations. African nations have only ever been price takers, and never sit around the tables where big decisions are made on oil and gas. They are takers of the risk but not takers of the profit which comes with these resources. By contrast, they could try and call the shots with a new generation of fuels. The other possibility

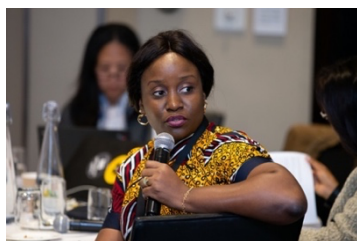
relates to the 4th industrial revolution which depends on a range of important strategic minerals many of which we have here in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). These offer a strategic entry point for building a different kind of economy. There are also many African countries without natural resource abundance, who need to invest in their human capital. Look at Japan, and South Korea which have become very prosperous on the basis of investing in people. There is a lesson there to learn. There is quite a good analogy with basketball players and athletes who can take advantage of their youthfulness up to a certain point, then they have to stop playing sport and diversify into advertising, communications, and all sorts of other things.

If we take the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), many are concerned that this will not be implemented according to the timetable. Many trade flows are currently seriously derailed. One sweet spot coming out of this crisis could be a focus on developing regional commodity markets and value chains, which allows for a deepening of our internal markets. This regional integration of economic activity and trade flows within Africa could make us less vulnerable, spread the risk and allow us to decouple from the very outward focused pattern of production and trade we have followed for decades, at our expense.

Leading from the Bottom: Local, Civic, and Youth Leadership

Chioma Agwuegbo, TechHer Nigeria : "African Youth Lead Response to COVID-19" August 2020.

Chioma Agwuegbo of TechHer Nigeria, talks to Folashadé Soulé and Herbert Mba Aki about how the pandemic is impacting young people in Nigeria, especially young women, and how various innovative solutions set up by African youth and civil society organizations are helping to tackle the crisis. Chioma Agwuegbo is the Executive Director at



[TechHer Nigeria](#), an organization demystifying technology for women and applying tech solutions towards societal problems, especially as they affect women. Her interests revolve around women, media, politics, and technology and her strategies advance causes, build businesses, and foster engagement between government and citizens. Chioma's foray into advocacy began in 2008, with the Light Up Nigeria Movement. Since then, she has functioned in leadership teams for campaigns such as Enough is Enough, Gen Voices, Occupy Nigeria, Bring Back Our Girls, Not Too Young To Run, and now StateofEmergencyGBV. She is an alumnus of the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers and served as Deputy Curator and Communications

Director of the Abuja Hub.

From your experience as a youth leader and social activist in Nigeria - in your opinion, how do you assess Nigeria's response to the pandemic, from government and citizen perspectives?

I would say, some people were slow to believe that we could be affected by the virus. At first, from December 2019, a lot of countries around the world thought it was a Wuhan issue, then it was a Chinese issue - and then it was an Asian issue and it wasn't going to get to Europe and it wasn't going to come to Africa. As a matter of fact, up till about the middle or even the end of January, there was rhetoric on the continent saying the coronavirus was not going to affect black people. By the time we got our first case, I believe at the end of February, a lot of communication damage had been done. And again, you have to think about the education and literacy levels of the people across the country and how diverse the country is.

First of all, the narratives across the country were a mess. In the Eastern part of Nigeria, the rhetoric was: "the Nigerian government is trying to impoverish the East". And then in the North with the country's largest congregation of Muslims, the rhetoric was: "we don't care about this because Allah gives and Allah takes, right? If a person dies, this is just their time". And then in other parts of the country, you had rhetoric saying: "I am already poor, I'm already hungry. I'm already without a job. This is not something I want to be bothered about: it's white man's sickness." And in my opinion, the communication from the government could have been more strategic, taking these different narratives into account.

But then, the response from some citizens to take personal responsibility has even been worse. I think this was due to the amounts of money that were touted everywhere. Bill and Melinda Gates foundation gave X amount of million dollars, WHO or the other gave X amount of million dollars. And so again, the narrative with some citizens became: "politicians are just looking for another excuse to collect money". I know that in Kano, there was a particular two-week period where over a thousand people died from strange causes. Verbal and visual autopsies had to be carried out on the dead to satisfy religious sensitivities, and the results were the deaths were consistent with Covid19 symptoms. How clearly and urgently was this communicated in that state and other states with similar strange

deaths? My overall opinion would be that beyond the big cities, the government handled communication very poorly.

What the government has done, which was heavily criticized, was the way they shared the money meant to go to people who were vulnerable. One of the major criticisms they got was that they gave out money in the form of cash. The pandemic is a call to limit human interaction, to take on things like mobile money, transfers, and generally reduce the handling of notes, which is a means for people to pass on the virus. But in doing so, the government didn't limit interaction. I remember the image on television and in the papers, there was a massive table with naira notes and the minister of humanitarian affairs; and photos of her passing these monies to the beneficiaries. Decked in a mask and gloves yes, but I thought, what were the messages passed with this type of display?

Prices of goods and services have increased; food has become a lot more expensive. Transportation is a lot more expensive. The question then becomes, you give out money once in April, but what's happened since then? Was this money supposed to take care of them during the entire period of the lockdown, or was there a plan to continue to give these people money? Because for instance, if you use equivalence: if a hundred dollars would typically last the family one month, because of the increases in transportation and food and everything, that \$100 now lasts them half a month. So, if you give them a hundred dollars in April, what happens to May? What happens to June? The country only started to ease lockdown in some areas in the middle of June and up till now, there are still some areas where we don't have flights because the airports have not been re-opened. So it's had a massive effect on food prices, on the movement of food and the movement of goods. As a result, illegal routes to get to different states have opened up.

So for me, there was a major communication lapse, which should have told people, this is what the virus is, this is how you can protect yourself. And this is our response to the virus as a government, and here is how that response covers you.

In terms of responses of the government in the beginning of this crisis, there were dual opinions about the pandemic in Africa. On the one hand, some analysts were very optimistic saying Africa has an experience of dealing with pandemics, like Ebola, for example, and that this would be an advantage for the management of COVID-19. On the other hand, there were others saying because of the lack of health infrastructures and everything, we would not be able

to handle the crisis. So far, do you think there were lessons learned from Ebola, which can make the management of COVID-19, let's say positive? Is the lack of infrastructure playing against the management of the current pandemic?

That's a big question. I would say that Nigeria managed Ebola very well. I think a lot of countries took lessons or learned lessons from Nigeria handling Ebola. I think that because our response, led by our heroine Dr Stella Adadevoh, was clear with messages saying: this is what to do; this is how you react to it: this is how we treat it. Very straightforward. But up till now Corona is still evolving. If you look at the advisories that come from the World Health Organization: today, they say, wear masks - tomorrow they say, no, don't wear masks except if you're ill. Then today they say, go out, but tomorrow they say, don't go out. They talk about herd immunity. Then they talk about not putting pressure on vulnerable people. It's a lot of information to process in a period of uncertainty.

But I think that our Center for Disease Control (NCDC) headed by Dr Chikwe Ihekweazu has done tremendously well. Nigeria is a country of about 200 million people. We have over 300 ethnic groups and most of these ethnic groups have different languages. Working to cover people that are so diverse, people who are so divided across religious lines and cultural lines and political lines is tough. And I think that one must give credit where credit is due. I think that they've handled the virus in Nigeria very well. I also believe that funding is a big part. Nigeria's health budget over the past five, six, maybe even 10 years has been consistently below the recommended percentages. Under the circumstances, therefore, they have done tremendously well, the political will supporting the work that they do has been less than desirable. For instance, a government official died, who was the president's chief of staff and, despite all of the advice and warnings about congregating from the NCDC, they had hundreds of people at his funeral, led by government officials. I keep saying if government models one approach to citizens, they cannot then ask them to do another thing. You can't tell people not to congregate, not to appear at events without masks, not to travel and respect the interstate travel restrictions, et cetera, if you're doing just that. So the political will hasn't been great.

I also think that inclusivity in the planning of responses to COVID-19 has not been great. If you look at sexual and gender-based violence, you would see the cases coming out of Nigeria have

been a little overwhelming. Sexual and gender-based violence wasn't classified as an emergency. Yet, we were recording cases every single day, every single night. When first responders go out to cater to families, for instance, to extricate a young girl who was sexually abused, they then get hurt, and questioned by the security forces: "why are you outside when the country is on lockdown?" Despite several layers of advocacy, it still hasn't been designated as an essential service. As far as I'm concerned, I do not think that the response has been as holistic as it could have been, especially on the side of government and political will, but on the side of the technocrats and the NCDC, I think they've done an excellent job with what they have.

Which initiatives and innovations were set up by African youth and civil society organizations in response to the pandemic?

It was civil society who started creating messages in various languages. It was civil society and individuals who started making comedy: creating content with a comedic value for citizens to understand what coronavirus is about. For instance, I know a videographer who I work with who doesn't even have a civil society organization. This is just a woman who runs a film business and she created video messaging in about six different languages. All she asked people to do was to share it with people in the villages. I know about other organizations. For instance, [TechHer](#) worked with another organization called SilverChipFox, setting up a series of conversations for entrepreneurs and young people. As soon as we went into lock down, these conversations helped folks repurpose their businesses. We talked about taking on more digital tools for working. We talked about *force majeure* (a common clause in contracts that essentially frees both parties from liability or obligation when an extraordinary event or circumstance beyond the control of the parties) and ways to renegotiate their contracts and grants agreements, etc.

And then we also talked about the mental effects of being in lockdown, the restriction of movement and all of those things. I know organizations who started holding wellness classes online. Instead of having people walk in for medical care, they started holding virtual conversations. But lots of the real work, a lot of the real impactful work has been led by young people. Just a few days ago, the Abuja Global shapers community was working with a group in Hong Kong, and delivered over 1,500 masks to people working in the markets and in the motor parks. And then they had a lot of messaging for these people saying, this is how you keep

yourself safe, here's how to reduce your risk, etc. They've done a number of other projects in this regard.

What has specifically been the role of [TechHer](#), your organization, to address COVID-19 impacts on youth in Nigeria?

One of the things that we did was a series on tools I mentioned on *force majeure*, to educate people about contracting, and also on mental health and wellness. Now we've put together a 12 part series on upscaling skills for women in the work that they're doing. Under our Continuous Learning Development Program, we will be teaching digital marketing career growth and development, such as emailing and use of that to market financial management, adapting business models, digital tools, registration, and taxation. Basically, we're teaching topics that we have taught before on different platforms. We're bringing it now into some arranged modules so that people can take advantage of them and sign up for things that really matter to them and their particular businesses.

We're currently just receiving expressions of interest from some of the people who are going to be training for us on this project. I think the greatest drawback for me is that we've not been able to reach our children. We had reached about 700 children in four months last year. But because schools are not open anymore, we can't reach these children. These children are very vulnerable, and they probably do not have electric power. There's obviously no access to the internet. There's literally no access to phones. But for the adults, we have a number of plans that are in progress on how we can engage them.

Finally, TechHer has coordinated some strategic responses for sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria, culminating in the #StateOfEmergencyGBV campaign that's advocating for a holistic response from our government on prevention and response to SGBV. The campaign is led by a number of organisations - TechHer, Girl Child Africa, Connected Development, Enough is Enough Nigeria, Stand To End Rape, SilverchipFox, Yiaga Africa, Dorothy Njemanze Foundation, and Education as a Vaccine. We're grateful for the responses we've seen, but we're anxious to do so much more.

You started talking about the gendered impact of COVID-19 and you mentioned sexual based violence. How do you think that COVID-19 has affected young women across sectors in Nigeria?

Let's start with education. Nigeria has the largest number of "out of school" children in the world with

about 13.2 million, and 60% of this number are young girls. At the same time, we have another 50 to 60 million receiving poor quality education. And I'll give an example of that: TechHer runs a school tour, teaching children in local education authority schools about technology using playing cards. Now, a number of these schools do not have access to electricity. They do not have access to decent toilets. So there's a sanitation issue there. The difference between them and children who are middle-class children or lower income children and not entirely vulnerable has been widened. Starting from education a lot more people are out of school, meaning that a lot of these people are locked-in with their abusers.

A lot more people are being pawned off to pay debts or to settle scores. If you look at the business, research shows that we have more women working in the informal sector than men. And this has to do with entrepreneurship and a lot of them are petty traders or run small businesses. All of these have been forced to shut down, with the restrictions imposed from the coronavirus, and people were unable to move their goods around.

Women are traditionally seen as dispensable because they're going to get pregnant anyway, take leave and be out of work, and not be able to contribute as much as their male colleagues. When the virus came along, a lot of them were told to take leave without pay. And there was nothing for people to fall back on. We've heard a number of reports about people taking to prostitution, and now solicitation in Nigeria is a crime. There is also the psychological effects of all of this: people with plans and dreams who have been affected. I've also heard of a number of cases, and this is by no means scientific because this is just people who have access to me, of women breaking down. Because the escape they had to drop the children off at school and then go to the workplace is gone, and people must work at home.

What do you think the role of African youth organizations could be in tackling, and participating in the recovery response from COVID-19 in Africa, potentially in collaboration with the government?

I think, to be honest, young people are doing enough. They're doing so much. I've seen so many new businesses spring up. There are people now who run entire businesses, just going to the markets for others so that people can reduce their exposure to the virus. There are people holding online teaching sessions for children because the federal government and the ministry of education have instructed that schools should not hold online

classes, but the reality is if they are not learning, what are they doing? So again, young people have now created new businesses, where they hold online classes. I know that my niece and my nephew are currently taking French classes, English classes, and science classes hosted by young people who have been rendered unemployed from the pandemic. There are civil society organizations that are holding the government to account. For instance, the government wanted to pass something called the infectious diseases control bill. So civil society organisations stood up to say, you cannot pass a bill because there's a pandemic without consulting Nigerians, you cannot use the excuse of a pandemic to foist restrictive, ill-thought-out laws on people. Despite the hindrances and the obstacles that continue to plague them, whether from the virus or from the government, young people are doing the best that they can. What we need at this point is a holistic plan from the government backed by sufficient political will to ease suffering. That's all we need.

How could the government of Nigeria support innovative activities during this pandemic?

I think the first thing is to learn the lessons that can be implemented when we've gotten a handle on the virus. TechHer hosted a series of conversations in collaboration with Mandipa Ndlovu called the Relaunching Africa Series, and we interviewed 21 Africans from 18 different African countries talking about how the continent can reimagine itself. One of the stories that we heard from South Africa was Tebogo Tsothela from the Gauteng Health Department talking about how the government worked to ensure that people were no more than five kilometers from the nearest testing centre. They created an app which they pushed very hard through campaigns and advertising, for citizens to assess themselves, see their risk to the virus, find a test centre, and then schedule to get physical tests done. This was also a platform for health workers to report to the central government when they started running out of PPE or other equipment. All in all, it is a very handy app for people to use. Contrast that with some states in Nigeria where doctors threatened to go on strike because they didn't have enough PPEs. They said, "If you're sending us to work without PPEs, you're signing our death warrants, because we will go there, contract the virus, and die. There are a number of states losing health workers. For me, the question is: what are the lessons that we can learn? How can we apply these lessons to other areas where we might be falling short in the delivery of services and governance to our people?"

The final thing I'm going to say about what our government can do is consultation. And this is consultation that doesn't just tick a box of 'yes, we've consulted', but consultation that you know is truly reflective of the heartbeat of the people.

Mo Ibrahim, Mo Ibrahim Foundation: "Some African leaders grabbed the COVID pandemic as a way to trespass on people's democratic rights" March 2021.

Dr Ibrahim is the Founder and Chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation which he established in 2006 to support good governance and exceptional leadership on the African continent. Sudanese-born, Dr Ibrahim has a distinguished business career.



In 1989 he founded Mobile Systems International (MSI), a world leading cellular consulting and software provider and in 1998, Celtel International, one of Africa's leading mobile telephone companies which pioneered mobile services in Africa and was sold to Zain in 2005. Dr Ibrahim is also Founding Chairman of Satya Capital Limited, a private equity fund focused on Africa and Chairman of TPG-Satya, a Joint African Investment Alliance

We'd be keen to hear how you see things one year on from the start of the COVID pandemic, the strengths shown by African countries in the face of this crisis and the difficulties ahead in re-booting a more sustainable, fairer pattern of growth. What do you think we've learned from the pandemic response in different parts of Africa – for political accountability and governance? Has African governance as a whole gone backwards or forwards as a result?

That's not an easy question. There are a lot of African countries, a lot of variation between them in how they responded, and it's dangerous to generalise. Having said that, I think the African response has been quite good. We had a bit of warning as it reached us a little bit later than other continents, but many African leaders did not waste time. They started checks at airports in Africa well before Europe, whether Heathrow, Amsterdam or Brussels – there were no checks there. People were being checked at Juba, even though at that stage there was not a single case in Juba. So, there was determined, fast action by people, they did not sit

on their hands. In general, many African leaders acted quickly. People in Africa are more attuned to pandemics than other nations, because we've just had too many of them, so we have some inbuilt readiness and resilience. African institutions like the Africa-CDC have acted very well. The African Union led by President Ramaphosa of South Africa has shown strong leadership and early on convened people from various constituencies, not only governments, but also private sector, civil society, and community leaders. Efforts were made to organise joint procurement for medical equipment and materials. There are always a few odd leaders of course, who deny the existence of COVID, or pretend it is not happening, but in general there was a reasonable response from many African leaders and institutions. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) led by Vera Songwe were very proactive and engaged from very early on, showing how this health and economic crisis raises many questions around issues of debt, interest payments and Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). We started these conversations as far back as last March in fact. This good response from Africa puts it above the bar. And if you compare them with actions by leaders in developed countries, they score a lot better than many western leaders. In Asia, leaders also acted quickly and strongly. Probably the stress on personal freedom and liberalism clouded the judgement of some European leaders, making them reluctant to lock people up, or subject them to too much testing or controls. It is probably a legacy of liberalism and democracy which led to a slow, and misguided response in the west.

It was reasonable performance, for certain aspects of governance, with quick action when faced with the pandemic. But on the other hand, the prevailing atmosphere also led to too much executive power being grabbed in fighting COVID which then impacted on African democracy. It did allow some autocratic leaders to overplay their hand. We have had the worst year for elections in 2020, probably for many past years. There have been too many presidential term extensions, flawed elections, and people standing for election for the umpteenth time, having been in power for more than 30 years. Leaders have been changing the age limits to stay in power, harassing their opponents, and using COVID to ban rallies of their opponents when they themselves had the freedom to address public meetings. Some people grabbed the pandemic as a way to trespass on people's democratic rights, especially during recent elections. We had many examples of this, so from this standpoint it has not

been a good year for governance.

Economic integration on the continent has been close to your heart for a long time, as shown by one of the first Mo Ibrahim Foundation Forum events held in Mauritius in 2010. Are there some really positive lessons from this crisis, in terms of pushing countries for more intensive industrialisation and self-sufficiency at a continental level?

Absolutely. With the disruption in transport and logistics worldwide, many supply chain weaknesses were exposed. There were issues with food security, procurement of medical devices, PPEs and various things. This disruption caused difficulties not only in Africa. Remember what we saw in the UK, with the scramble to procure PPE for the National Health Service, the over-inflated prices, commissions and big fees that were paid for materials which were then discarded as substandard. There were several consignments from Turkey, the US and elsewhere for medical gloves and kits which were considered not fit for purpose. Procurement rules had been waived, no competitive bidding, and newly-formed companies were given contracts despite having absolutely no experience. So, everywhere there has been lots of funny stuff! But we're not here to talk about the UK.

There have been real difficulties when people find they don't have essential local supplies available. We've seen that global supply chains are very fragile and subject to nationalistic demands, which can put everything in danger. The argument for self-reliance in Africa and building resilient trade with your neighbours has been made very forcibly by the events we have seen. It is key that Africa has just signed up to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). What we hope for now is to see its implementation – let's see it put into action. African leaders are famous at signing up to things. Now we need to see what they'll actually do to put it into effect. Things can get stuck in parliaments where they haggle over the small print. But we will really rely on this FTA in times of crisis, when we can no longer get things from China or EU. It's a really useful lesson to focus people's minds. Lack of supplies meant our doctors, nurses and health workers were not protected during the crisis, which was very sad, tragic actually. Now we're having a battle over vaccines, but that is another issue.

If everyone has signed up to AfCFTA, what would give you confidence, in practice, that governments are moving beyond signature to implementation? What would you like to see happening on the ground, in terms of things like border barriers?

We need pressure put on governments by civil society and by business. They must play their role in pushing governments to open up access to each other's markets. The value is huge from this. Just watch the way in which the UK and EU are haggling around Brexit and the terms of market access. It's very important. Free trade between our countries will enhance our GDPs and be good for everybody. It will make Africa more attractive for business. Let's say I want to invest in a factory in Benin, but it's a small country. If I want a successful business, my factory in Benin needs to supply Mali, Senegal and Burkina Faso and other neighbouring countries because then I have scale. With scale, I can keep prices low, and I can compete. Scale is very important. What is the strength of China? Its scale - nothing more than that. They can leverage 1.4b people. We also must build that scale in Africa. All businesspeople understand this, so they must stand up, push and fight for this, as must civil society. It's going to bring more jobs and better prices, as well as safety in time of stress and crisis, so we get better food and supply security. Everyone knows it needs to happen - so let's please just get it done.

Looking at border barriers, if you grow tomatoes in this country, and you want to sell in the neighbouring country, it is a big problem as things get stuck at the border and they go completely rotten. Some stuff has to move quickly, especially without a lot of refrigerated trucks and sophisticated logistics. To meet market gaps efficiently, we must demolish these borders and allow goods, people and capital to flow across these borders. This would really bring prosperity.

"Africa's place in the world" was the topic of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation Governance weekend initially scheduled for Addis Ababa last year. This has been period of rapid change and evolution, and many global actors and powers want to gain more access to the continent - China, Russia, the US, EU and others. How can African actors - governments, business, civil society - use this interest to their advantage, and create more room for manoeuvre from a political and economic point of view?

Very good question! There is more attention now paid to Africa by others. We're a youth market which is growing fast, and there's a growing middle class, so a big growth in consumption - look at your Apple head-set, for example. Not only young people, in fact everyone wants this electronic stuff now. Business is waking up to this good news about the African market. For us, the more suitors we have, the better the deals we should be able to negotiate. It is not only China, EU and US, but also Turkey, the

Gulf states, Russia and more. It is to our advantage to have as many people interested as possible. But there is also a danger, since some of these actors can bring conflicts to Africa. While many have primarily economic interests, they also have geo-political and strategic interests on the African continent. Look at how many countries are engaged in Libya, for example. Every Tom, Dick and Harry is in Libya! Why? What are they doing there? Or take the Horn of Africa, where there are so many new army bases. Even China has a base there now. So, this is a potential danger from the rising interest of all these countries getting involved in Africa. They're exporting their conflicts to us. We should be saying to them "look guys, fight your problem over there, do not fight proxy wars on our continent, don't bring it over here!" It's us who will suffer.

None of these people are coming because they're charitable. They come because they see a profit-margin there, but that's just business for you. We definitely need to have the ability to negotiate contracts better and have greater transparency. Unfortunately, many of these business contracts lack transparency. We don't know exactly what the terms of many contracts say. We also need to be wary of excessive debts. People come to you saying, "we can build a beautiful bridge here or a wonderful road there." If you answer, "But I don't have the money." They will say "Don't worry, we'll lend it to you." But we should be much more careful about getting into debt, look at the contract, and the price of these projects. Because you end up being in a lot of inextricable debt, if you're not careful. \$44 billion we had to pay out last year in interest payments. This is at a time when all our economies are closed down, they've tanked, and yet we're having to pay this amount in interest every year - we're not even paying back the capital. There is also the question of where these loans went. What were they used for? *Timeo Danaos...* Let us beware of strangers coming bearing gifts. We need to be sensible and avoid these white elephant projects, otherwise we leave our young people with a huge debt. And then we go and ask people to cancel our debts which is not right.

Things seem to be going a bit better with the EU who want to re-set relations. We've just formed the Africa Europe Foundation which brings together civil society, business, institutions, youth from both continents, the African Union and European Commission to try and work out practical things they can do together, out of shared interest. There's a growing realisation that if Africa sneezes, Europe will catch a cold. The migration crisis has made that absolutely clear. It was a near and present danger to

European democracy. It seems strange to me, that refugees from Africa and the Middle East almost brought down governments in Europe. People appreciate that if there is a problem here in Africa, you need to go and help address it. You can't do this by putting a fleet in the Mediterranean. But you can support development and jobs for young people. If you have conflicts in Africa, you'll get refugees, so it's much better to work for peace and security in Africa. That should be the basis for development. Without security what can you do? Is any development going on in Darfur? Of course not. Villages have been burnt, people migrated, schools have been burnt. How can you have development? What about the Sahara and the Sahel – this is a huge ungoverned space, with all sorts of jihadist and different groups contesting governments and joining grievances. It's a catastrophe! They threaten the basis of states in the region. This undermines governments and stability which will unleash a tide of refugees on Europe, so our fates are very closely entwined. I am focused on this, there are just a few miles between us. Our futures are very close.

China is welcome. China is a huge power. They had a huge fight about corruption at home with 90 or 100,000 people put in jail. It was massive! We want to see some of that zeal implemented in terms of China's deals with Africa. It should be indivisible, so if you fight corruption at home, you should apply the same rules in Africa. The US has been absent from Africa for many years and the recent period of President Trump even made things much worse. He described us as "shitholes". We remember that! Even their strategy for Africa was just a strategy to combat China in Africa. Sorry guys! Some respect please. We're not just a battleground for the US and China. Let's have a US strategy about us and our interests. We hope this new administration will have a more globalist view, which looks more for partnerships. It's still early days, we've heard some good noises, but we need to see action of the ground. We will await judgement. For the Gulf states, they had a big fight amongst the cousins, which spilled out into the Horn of Africa. Happily, now they have kissed and made up. Let African people lead their own life - don't come and fight your problems here.

You insist on the necessity of transparency. Many of these contracts, not only with China but also with other powers, they lack transparency which opens the door for more corruption. It's right for African governments to solve this issue, but many of them have their own internal issues. They don't seem to be able to ask for more transparency, especially in their relations with countries like China. Shouldn't the

pressure and necessity for transparency come from other actors, such as African civil society?

Yes, we all must do this. But we can't give a free pass to governments. It is their job, after all. They are the ones who sign the contracts. We need to ask them "why are you not being transparent? Are you getting some money under the table? Is this the reason? Is money in a brown envelope the reason why you have chosen to shroud the contract in secrecy?" Is government beholden to China for some reason, and in their debt and unable to pay? I can't see why a government or leader in Africa would refuse to be transparent about this. You're either corrupt or inept. In both cases, you should not be a leader. Civil society has to insist as must other actors. When some bank gets involved in this fiasco in Mozambique, pretending to buy fishing fleets, a few people ended up with huge commissions, but no one caught a single fish, and the country is now in debt – what is the role of banks in this? Banks must be responsible and show transparency. They should be punished if they do this kind of dirty deal. In the US, they would have been fined many million dollars, whereas in Africa no-one gets fined or brought to justice. If you make a mistake in the developed world, you have to pay. Look at BP and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico for which they were responsible, they were absolutely taken to the cleaners and had to pay billions of dollars. If people do that in Nigeria, nothing happens. They pollute the Gulf of Guinea, and nothing happens, People live for decades in an oil-infested landscape with its terrible pollution. It took so many years to get one ruling in Europe against an oil company for their activities in Nigeria. We need to reinforce the laws locally and globally.

One of the consequences of the pandemic has been a big fall in demand for oil and its price, with big knock-on effects for African oil exporting countries like Angola, Nigeria and Algeria. New African oil exports are also going to find that their market disappears. What is practical and fair for new African oil exporters? Should they leave it in the ground and leapfrog straight to green energy?

The problem is twofold. First is this "rent" economy. I find oil, I sit back and go to sleep, selling oil and others pay me money. What a terrible mistake! Nigeria used to have a diverse economy, it used to feed itself, and it had one of the best agricultural systems in the continent. But since oil started flowing, what has happened? They gave up on agriculture and they now import most of their food. They have just been sitting back and getting the petrol rent, fighting amongst themselves, with

petrol money fuelling so much corruption. This strategy has been a disaster. But change is coming. The writing has been on the wall. Like it or not, the world is going green. It has to happen. Everyone is going off oil. In a few years, you won't be able to buy a new car that uses petrol. The cost of renewable energy is coming down below fossil prices. Prices are plummeting. If I am an oil-producing country, should I look back at yesterday's economy, or think about tomorrow and how to diversify? Its going to be painful. If you've been receiving 90% of your money from oil and now it has gone down to one third, that's 2/3 of your budget gone. It's going to be painful. But I think people have started to get the message about the risks not only of relying on oil, but in relying on one single economic asset. African countries have got themselves trapped – look at Guinea and iron ore, copper in Zambia, diamonds in Botswana. We have to move away from this. A diverse economy is the only way to withstand economic shocks. So it's a very useful wakeup call.

We've touched on a lot of big issues, but what's keeping you awake at night?

Yes, there are too many issues I have been arguing for, but most of all now it is vaccines and African debt. These are really important because African countries don't have the fiscal space to support our economies. Many businesses are going bankrupt. Look at the collapse of tourism with hotels, and tour companies – no more customers, nobody, nothing. In rich countries, governments are throwing cash at everyone, businesses and individuals. They say “Stay at home and I give you a very soft loan.” But that cannot happen in Africa. There is a substantial amount of debt, and there's been a lot of talk but no action. Some speak of a \$100b injection and the prospect of SDRs. There is \$500b in SDRs which could potentially be offered to African states. But some countries say “no, no, - we can't do this – Africa will just use it to pay China off.” China also needs to come into the conversation, because much of the debt is owed to them. They need to show some empathy. If they are to be a true champion of the developing world, this is the moment to show it. Solidarity is more than nice words and speeches. What are we going to do about debt? Its not fair to ask the western countries to cancel the debt and only the Chinese reap the benefit, leaving African countries with no extra money.

On the vaccine side, its worrying to see this vaccine nationalism, and countries fighting over supplies. Most rich countries ordered and booked far more vaccines than they actually need. Canada, for example, has five shots for every citizen. Why do

you need as many as five shots? At the same time, we need to see people vaccinated in Africa. It's a basic question of equality and humanity. You cannot save guys here and leave those over there to die. This is a truly global disease. It's a bit like climate change. You have to do it globally. You can try and go for net zero carbon here, but you need everyone else to go for net zero if we are to have a decent global climate. This pandemic is global too. This virus doesn't know borders, and the more we let this virus mutate elsewhere, the more difficulty we face. We're already seeing that maybe the vaccinations we have now will not be as effective on the new mutations. And that's after only a few months of vaccination. What is going to happen in another few months? In 6 months, we are likely to find more and more mutations have appeared, so we can say yes, the UK has done a great job and vaccinated everyone by the end of May. But you may then find you have to do it all over again. Its going to be a terrible waste of billions of dollars. Its very short-sighted. If we want to defeat the virus, we have to defeat it globally. This comes out of self-interest, not out of charity. Rich countries need to be smart and sensible.

Nanjala Nyabola, Advox – Global Voices, Kenya: “Techno-solutions won't save us from the problems we face” September 2021.

In this interview, Dr. Folashadé Soulé and Dr. Camilla Toulmin discuss with Nanjala Nyabola, a writer and researcher based in Nairobi, Kenya. Nanjala's



work focuses on the intersection between technology, media, and society. She is currently the Director of Advox, the digital rights programme at Global Voices. Nanjala has held numerous research associate positions including with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the Oxford Internet Institute (OII), and other institutions, while also working as a research lead for several projects on human rights broadly and digital rights specifically around the world. Nanjala Nyabola is also a founding member of the Africa Digital Rights Network (ADRN) and a fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), the Digital Forensic Lab at the Atlantic Council, The

Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology (CIPIT) at Strathmore University, and the Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ) at NYU. She has published in several academic journals and is the author of *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era is Transforming Politics in Kenya* (Zed Books, 2018) and *Travelling While Black: Essays Inspired by a Life on the Move* (Hurst Books, 2020).

Starting with a general question - how, in your view, is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting digital transformation in Africa?

I have never been a big champion of the idea of “digital transformation”. We always try to push back some of the more uncomfortable questions and create a utopian view of technology, when the lived experience of many countries shows that it’s a bit more complicated than that. Trying to skip over complicated social and political questions does ourselves a disservice. For me, the idea of digital transformation puts too much emphasis on the capacity of technology to change our society and neglects our own agency in doing this ourselves. Like all crises, I would say that COVID-19 has presented both challenges and opportunities. The challenges are obvious: the healthcare systems are stressed, public health in many African countries is struggling, there is a rising death rate, heavy costs to the economy from all the lockdowns, and rising inequality which has become really apparent. The challenges are all around us, but the opportunities have also been interesting. African countries are now thinking concretely about manufacturing and distributing vaccines, with the technology and investments that spin-off from this. They’ve been looking at new ways of managing travel and mobility, progress has been made on the Africa free trade agreement, as has work on the African passport, and systems for monitoring travel.

I am encouraged that despite the challenges we’re facing, which are truly once in a generation - a “make or break” moment for humanity - there’s still a lot of positive energy. It’s remarkable that there’s a lot of impetus to think beyond the crisis, and to ask: how can we use technology and innovation to build back stronger and more creatively? I’ve always maintained that digital is part of a larger tapestry of measures. It’s not something to be thought of out of context, but within the context of the societies experiencing these challenges. One thing that’s become apparent is that a lot of countries spent large parts of their budgets on shifting towards tech-based solutions, when that

money would have been better spent paying doctors and nurses. In Kenya, the government promised a laptop per child, and that didn’t happen. Children stayed at home when schools got closed during the pandemic, they didn’t have any way of staying updated with schools. At the same time, it was remarkable to have gone from no African country being able to test for COVID in January 2020 to every single African country being able to test for COVID three months later. The real challenge now is going to be how to stay focused on the priorities. How do we avoid the attractions of tech solutions derailing us from the really deep structural issues that also need our attention?

Does this pandemic represent an opportunity for African governments to rethink the role of innovation, technology and digitalisation in their countries’ development models?

Absolutely. Again, we’ve been reminded to set clear priorities. We shouldn’t focus on technology for its own sake, it has to be embedded in the broader demands for justice, equality, service delivery, and respect, all of which make society function. We’ve been reminded that even if you build the most sophisticated app, if you’re not building it with normal human beings in mind, it’s not going to help you with the core questions you seek to address. At the same time, there has been remarkable innovation - take Kenya, where the vaccine tracking system is entirely digital, and decentralized. Every vaccination centre contributes to building the database, and people get the vaccination record on their phone. Now, granted there aren’t that many people in Kenya, or Africa as a whole, who’ve been vaccinated - only 500,000 to 600,000 so far (at the time of interview) - but it’s a good example of building technology in context. Mobile phones are the primary way through which most people in Kenya access the internet, so having that record on your phone is actually incredibly helpful and enables the person to travel around the country and wider region with relative ease. It’s focused on a simple solution, rather than an elaborate form of digital ID that would have required a much more expensive infrastructure. That’s the kind of tech we want to see. It’s not about taking the most beautiful platform and throwing a lot of money at it. It’s about building a system that works best for the people, and meshes with their needs, their capacities, and the financial capacity of the country. We don’t want to spend more on the vaccine tracking system than on buying vaccines.

These are the tough questions a lot of poor countries, not just in Africa but around the world,

have to consider, and then order their priorities and spend accordingly. There are many encouraging signs that the message is getting through and the right balance being reached. Techno solutions are not going to save us from the bigger problems we face, like lack of access to vaccines in the face of this pandemic. It's not just about tech, but goes back to the fundamentals of human beings and society, getting treatment to sick people and protecting them from illness.

Have you also observed a specific gendered effect on digital access since the beginning of the pandemic?

For sure. Gender disparities have been embedded in the way tech is rolled out. Again, this is not a uniquely African problem, but is found in many societies. A GSMA report found that women were 20% less likely than men to use the internet, and while that is a reduction from the 28% of the previous year, it's still a gap. The same report found that South Asia has the biggest gender disparity at 51%, but it is a huge problem in a lot of countries because of the way that societies are structured and what technology represents. The majority of people in poor countries connect to the internet through their mobile phones, which represent a luxury item or an essential business tool. Within the family, young women and girls are the least likely to have access to a mobile phone and therefore by extension to the internet. So young women faced a big problem by losing access to education during the lockdowns, when schools were shut, and had no access to the internet either. In a number of African countries there has been a spike in teenage pregnancies triggered by conditions during the pandemic, representing a major loss of educational opportunity for young women.

I keep saying that the pandemic represents a generational shock or crisis, which will determine what the next 100 years look like. If young women get locked out of this big shift - when we're moving to a digital-first system, for tax payments, ID systems, driver's licence, everything - then we're setting back young women by a generation or more. It's definitely a concern in many countries and why it's so important to have sociologists and anthropologists who examine these inequalities. These are not things that technology is going to fix. Rather, we have to understand our societies in order to make sure that our responses reflect the realities of how our societies are structured.

Do you think that the exercise of digital rights has been even more restricted and challenged with the ongoing pandemic in Africa?

There has been an effort to undermine the right to privacy, which is a cornerstone of digital rights. The process of building digital passports and a digital vaccine system has been based on tracking people, finding out where they're going and who they're meeting up with. In Singapore, even though there was a promise that tracking data would be private, it ended up not being private and the data that was being collected was handed over to the police. Some countries are using tracking data to control migration, which is a clear violation of digital rights. The pandemic requires good policy in the short, medium and long term. For governments and for policy makers in government, the challenge with digital rights is how to balance short term gains with the long-term risk; but violating digital privacy and digital rights in the short term with the idea that we will recover them in 20 years, in 30 years is not realistic. It doesn't work.

It's much easier to give rights away than to get them back. There has been a constant push and pull, and an overreach in many countries, in which a desire to expand surveillance, constrain privacy, and track people's movement has become a real threat. In a lot of African countries, we've been saved from this because surveillance kit is expensive, and governments have suffered a big fall in revenue from the lockdowns, economic hits, and falling tourism. That's really the buffer that has been keeping people safe for now, but it might not always be this way, and the pandemic isn't over yet.

I was also thinking of some governments, the latest being Nigeria, for instance, cutting digital access to certain platforms and social networks. Do you have the impression that governments are increasingly seeking to control digital access by their citizens, using the pandemic as cover?

This tendency was already coalescing before the pandemic. Tanzania was the latest one. But in 2021, Nigeria banned Twitter, Uganda shut down social media for three weeks, Tanzania shut it for six weeks, and Chad had a shutdown around the death of the president. Nigeria is so far the biggest to have done it, in terms of population size and the economy. But it's definitely a growing trend amongst governments over recent years, to stop people from criticizing them, and pushing back against the official online narratives. This executive overreach through shutting digital platforms down is going to continue; it fits into the broader expansion of authoritarianism around the world. Governments are less tolerant of criticism and more excessive in the way that they respond to criticism. For instance, Belarus diverted a commercial plane

in order to arrest a journalist and his girlfriend; people in Hong Kong are sent to jail for many years for protesting, it's part of a broader picture in which authoritarian patterns are growing. African countries are no exception to this rule, but they could choose to be an exception by providing more democratic responses.

COVID represents a really major opportunity to decide what the next 50 or a hundred years could look like. If states succumb to the authoritarian impulse and push the line 'we don't want to hear any criticism', 'we don't want to hear any pushback', then unfortunately the next 50 years will be characterized by a silencing of civilians and critics of the state. It's part of a broader issue that the pandemic makes more complex and urgent.

As they say, a crisis should never go to waste. What do you think are the two or three key shifts in regulation that are required, not only at the national but also at the sub-regional level such as ECOWAS, and continent-wide? How might new regulations reshape the digital economy for the next 10 to 15 years and lead to a more inclusive digital transformation?

I've been listening into a lot of the digital policy conversations taking place at the African Union. And I think that our policy makers, at regional level, still assume that they need only deal directly with governments, and hence they ignore citizens. The interest in preserving the integrity of states has unfortunately outweighed the interest in preserving the dignity and safety of Africa's people, so we have lost the right priorities and balance. The conversations about digital policy focus on regulation, cyber security, and computer security, a series of threats, rather than looking at rights, dignity and inclusivity. The people who work on digital rights in Africa have been exclusively in civil society, operating outside the state. We need governments in Africa to start seeing digital rights as their responsibility, one of the state's obligations. This would imply stopping the view of civil society as part of the opposition, but instead one of the pillars of governance and society. We were in meetings last month with government where we asked ourselves – when at any point did you consult civil society, and the digital rights activists who have been working on these issues for the last 10 years? Lack of any consultation by government means that policy is poorly informed and ends up tilting power in favour of government, instead of the people.

Let's engage in dialogue and conversation with civil society, which has been working on these issues. Let's put the African citizen at the centre of our

policymaking rather than the African state. The state might not exist in its current form in future years; the structure of states changes all the time. South Sudan only became independent in 2011. If we privilege the survival and strengthening of the state, over the protection of the citizen, we end up creating opportunities for harm. We end up creating policies that say it doesn't matter that X number of people, of minorities lose their lives or lose their access to services, because the cybersecurity of the state is guaranteed and that's more important. In Kenya, for example, some argue that it doesn't matter if some Somali people are not able to get ID cards, because it's about the security of the government. As a result, many Somali people from Kenya have a really hard time getting basic services, and access to bank accounts. That is same with the Nubian people in Kenya. These are the tensions that we have to be honest about. And I think we could navigate them by having an honest conversation about how civil society could be part of the policy making process in which the individual and the rights of the individual are placed firmly at the centre.

Bara Guèye, IED Afrique, Senegal: “Young African People See No Clear Future for Themselves” April 2021.

Bara Guèye draws on over 35 years in West African development practice. His professional activity and scientific work have used participatory



action research to promote good practice in local governance of natural resources, strengthen family farming, build more resilient communities in the face of climate change and support decentralized financing models for adaptation. He began his professional career as a teacher and researcher at the National School of Applied Economics (ENEA) in Senegal. He then worked for the Drylands Programme of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED, UK) for more than 10 years before setting up in 2005, the Senegalese NGO Innovation, Environment and Development in Africa (IED Afrique) of which he was the Director until 2019. He has published several articles and reports including Guèye, B. (2014). Specialization or

diversification? Divergent perspectives on irrigated rice cultivation in three large dams in the Sahel.

After this first twelve months of measures taken to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, what is the current situation in Senegal? How do you assess the actions taken by the government and NGOs?

We had our first case of COVID-19 right at the beginning of March 2020, making it now one year and a few days. It's true that at first, Senegal like many other countries, was both shocked and surprised by this new pandemic. At a global level, I think even developed countries didn't have a clear strategy for addressing it, which created a situation of general panic. But it prompted Senegal to enact a series of measures early on, which were extremely demanding both for the country and for ordinary people, in order to contain the disease. The population was quick to follow these measures, and they were anxious, which was both a problem but also brought its advantages, since fear of the disease meant that difficult measures were accepted from the beginning. Even in terms of the politics of the country, I noted a kind of sacred agreement between government, civil society, and opposition parties. Other agendas were shelved for the time being. This popular agreement meant that all the proposed measures were accepted: curfew, tight controls on markets, closure of non-essential shops, a ban on some forms of transport and strict limits on others, controls on movement between cities and regions, and even the shutting of places of worship. All such measures were put in place at once, but started to generate significant economic and social damage.

These adverse impacts were sufficiently damaging that control measures could not be kept in place for long, because we have an economy that depends essentially on the informal sector, and someone who relies on the informal sector cannot be without work for long. In Senegal, more than 80% of urban dwellers operate in the informal sector, with the majority earning just enough to feed themselves day-by-day. It's quite different from those with a salary in the public sector, or private sector employees, who together constitute only a tiny minority. In order to minimize the impacts of such measures on the most vulnerable households and economic sectors (tourism, craftwork, transport, amongst others), the State made available the sum of one thousand billion FCFA (equivalent to US\$ 1.736bn); this is an enormous sum for a country like Senegal, given the size of its GDP. This fund was then able to distribute food packages, and take charge of water and electricity bills for the poorest

households for three months, to help get over this exacting period of time. There were also measures taken to support particular sectors, like tourism, craftwork, transport, culture, amongst others.

While communications were not brilliant at the start, a strategy to accompany the government's measures was then put in place, working with the media, community-based organizations, religious authorities, trade unions, women, and youth associations, etc. Everyone was asked for their help, and that contributed to people accepting the measures put in place. The result of all these actions has been that the country succeeded in managing the pandemic reasonably well, such that by October 2020, there had been a very significant fall in the number of COVID cases.

But at the same time as we saw this positive evolution of the pandemic, respect for social distancing and other measures mentioned above, became weaker and weaker. You got the impression that the social threshold of tolerance for these measures had been reached if not surpassed. People had begun to suffer increasingly, which the government recognized by shifting its message to learning to live with the virus. This meant in effect taking up normal activities while trying to maintain some degree of protective measures. This situation was reinforced by the fact that infection rates had fallen, and the population reached the conclusion that COVID had been defeated, leading to an abandonment of all controls. People went back to their normal lives and way of doing things pre-pandemic, and left behind the protective measures whether in public spaces, in transport, family occasions, etc. The government equally could not continue to force people to comply, given the economic, social, and political impacts. The consequence has been an explosion in new cases from November 2020 onwards. According to some people, this new wave of infections is also linked to the fall in temperature at this time of year.

Unfortunately, when the government wanted to restore some of the restrictions, in order to contain the new wave of cases, there was no longer the same level of compliance and willingness to abide by the rules. The curfew was reinstated in Dakar and Thiès, which account for 80% of COVID infections in Senegal. But overall, people are no longer following the protective measures. The state of health emergency came to an end on March 19th, 2021, which meant the lifting of all restrictions, except for some limited measures, and life returned to normal. It is true that with the recent violent events, the State really had no choice but to soften

considerably the restrictions on daily life. Amongst the many frustrations expressed during the demonstrations, there is the sense that the money found to help out the most vulnerable groups and sectors had not been fairly managed, nor transparently handled. A large number of complaints were made about this. According to some people, certain economic sectors or social groups had been left stranded.

The expiry of the state of health emergency therefore provided the government with a good excuse to lift the restrictions. Happily, we can see today a downwards trend in the number of new cases and deaths, even if it is too soon to draw firm conclusions.

You've mentioned a fair number of measures taken by the government during the pandemic. Can you also tell us of actions by civil society, such as by community-based groups, over the course of the health crisis?

Yes, there have been lots of examples, as there are so many different sorts of community-based organizations here, each one of which has mobilized its people and resources in support, and in giving out messages. If you're looking at community organizations, religious leaders hold great authority and exercise a lot of influence over people. They became involved very early on and their messages invited all their members to follow the rules laid down. We have seen, for example, that religious leaders have been scrupulous in wearing a mask whenever they go out. This has had great symbolic significance because there remain a number of people who say that the disease COVID-19 doesn't exist, or that it's a creation of rich developed countries used as a tool to control population growth in poor countries. If this kind of misinformation is allowed to spread in a society where people don't have the means to discern what is true or false, this can have a big impact on communication.

Researchers, especially anthropologists, went into action from early on, in those areas with particularly high cases of COVID to undertake "action research," which allowed them better to understand people's behaviour faced with this disease, so that they could design more effective strategies for reaching them. In addition, there have been initiatives launched by sports and cultural associations, to engage local neighbourhoods to compete amongst themselves, in place of the regular football games.

I should also mention the involvement of an

important community resource – *Badienou Gokh* - or "neighbourhood grannies", made up of women volunteers who remind people about questions of health, keeping the streets clean, questions of security, etc. They are really important opinion leaders who are brought in whenever you need to get people moving around a social issue. Such women are present in all regions of the country and played a vital role in the fight against the pandemic. I should also underline the role of the media, which were amongst the first to get moving; similarly, artists and musicians actively contributed to a range of activities aimed at helping people understand what is going on. There have been, as you can see, many kinds of initiatives, some deeply local and rooted, others the result of support from the state and NGOs.

Nevertheless, over time, the shifts in attitude and behaviour towards the pandemic have been accompanied by a reduced intensity in such social mobilization campaigns, because these are behavioural practices that are really hard to continue over a long period of time, especially when voluntary. But they were very important in terms of the results gained in the early months. Besides, Senegal has been cited as a good example for pandemic management, thanks to this multi-actor strategy and approach, combined with regular, clear publication of COVID statistics. From the first case onwards, a regular daily bulletin has been issued by national TV, on the radio, and on websites.

Continuing with this discussion of social and governmental reactions, how do you see the recent disturbances in Senegal, the series of demonstrations, which have, as you rightly noted, drawn from a range of factors, including multiple frustrations. Give us your thoughts on this movement, and how far this represents the need for a significant shift in Senegal's development model.

The act which unleashed these demonstrations relates to a case between two private citizens which normally would be dealt with by the justice system without too much noise. But the situation very quickly took on aspects of a police thriller or sitcom. As I mentioned, this case exploded into a context and at a time when frustrations had been boiling over, above all amongst young people. The case sparked an inferno, setting loose a movement, which, if you listen to them, has its roots not just in political concerns. Above all are the frustrations which have built up over the months caused or exacerbated by the consequences of COVID.

For more than a year, people's movement and liberty have been constrained; young people

haven't been able to go to local sports practice or watch a football match, or boxing match – a very popular leisure activity. For those relying on incomes from the informal sector, their livelihoods have been wiped out; those hoping to set off on clandestine migration have had to wait, and may not be able to try again; etc. Next to them, you have a political class that has been daggers-drawn around a number of contentious issues. Young people began to believe that all their future hopes were being abolished, and they started pointing fingers at both national and international conspiracies. At the same time, while they had been suffering badly from the crisis, they had the impression that some people had managed to profit from their position and do well from other people's difficulties.

Young people were completely fed up to see all their liberties being silenced, their movements reduced to a strict minimum. Popular movements are always multi-dimensional. As I mentioned, the majority of those who came out to demonstrate had no specific political affiliation. For example, you could see some of those demonstrating were more interested in taking advantage of attacks on French-owned shops, in order to sack them and steal basic goods like rice, sugar, oil or milk, often leaving other more valuable goods in place.

Following the riots, the President made a speech in which he recognized the difficulties which young people had been facing and promised a series of measures to address them. It remains to be seen how and in what way such commitments will be made real. You find the same situation in many African countries, in which young people see no clear future for themselves. They ask questions about what will happen to them but there are no answers forthcoming; speeches from public leaders are not convincing, and they see continuing malpractice in governance and management of the state's affairs. Increasingly they recognize, often correctly, that things do not work right because the country is poorly governed.

This is an extremely serious question, and it is highly likely that this sort of situation will become much more common because much has changed over the last 20 or 30 years. Today, many young people are well-educated, social networks provide a means to amplify any messages, whether positive or damaging; civil society has become more mature and keeps a closer eye on questions of liberty, democracy and governance. Our political leaders can no longer close their eyes to this new reality, which will catch up with them sooner or later.

We've seen emerge in Senegal over the last few years a new form of political expression led by young people against different forms of domination, be they domestic or international. This was clearly manifest in the riots by attacks on many symbols, such as the French flag on shops, and petrol stations, considered symbols of this domination. Clearly, these are acts that should be firmly condemned, because nothing can justify them, above all because these assets belong in most part to private individuals.

The demonstrations only lasted three days but their scale has generated major consequences. This crisis has also shown the central role of people and institutions with power in Senegalese society. The crisis became sufficiently severe that its resolution was no longer just a question for politicians. Without the involvement of religious leaders, the situation in the country could have degenerated into total chaos. The critical role of religious leaders was made only too evident once again. This has shown the very particular Senegalese situation in which religious and political powers are so closely connected. So, these recent events remind us that socio-religious leaders, in whom people have confidence, are of central importance, above all at a time when there is widespread disaffection with political parties.

The situation that I have just described raises the question of what kind of development model is right for our countries. People speak sometimes of Africa as the region of the world which is most likely to lead global economic growth in the decades to come. We've seen in recent years growth rates of 6-8% per annum in Senegal, but the health emergency has shown that this growth – which was not anyway benefitting most people – had been built on shaky foundations. Growth has been pulled along by investment in sectors with very little distributive power, leading young people to ask themselves about the government's priorities. They argue that the large sums put into big projects would better have been invested in those sectors where many people are employed, such as farming, livestock keeping, fishing, and craftwork, which together provide most of the jobs. Ordinary people and families could have gained from growth in these sectors, with positive spin-offs into other areas like industry, transport, and tourism. But investment is much below potential in these sectors.

As a result, most young people find themselves in the informal sector. But it seems to me that the social structure within the informal sector is

undergoing rapid change since so many young people are going in with a high level of training and education, and also a greater political understanding. As a result, they are much more open to political arguments in favour of emancipation. Today we really need to understand and learn from the new discourse or narrative, with a degree of realism, taking into account the globalized nature of our economies and that of the world more generally. If we're to re-think our relations within Senegal and with other countries, it has to be done within this broader global context.

Many countries in Africa today are thinking about a post-COVID strategy. Senegal has its Emergent Senegal Plan (PSE), which shapes its development strategy. Has there been a real shift in consciousness and thinking so that major revisions to economic growth paths are being considered, especially following the riots?

We're thinking the same thing here in Senegal. As you say, the PSE provides a vision for 2035 that recognizes three strategic pillars, the first of which concerns the structural transformation of the economy in favour of those sectors considered best able to generate growth and development. The second pillar relates to human capital, social protection, and sustainable development, based on training and job creation for young people, putting in place social protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable groups, and the third pillar is for governance, institutions, security, and peace. I am pleased that our leaders have put forward this long-term vision because they have often in the past got us used to short-term plans, based on a lack of strategic vision.

Today it's true that you can find much adverse comment and criticism as regards how the PSE has been put into effect. Let's take the agricultural sector, in which there are a number of big projects envisaged, but many questions about the priorities chosen, and how investments have actually been distributed within this sector. The focus on high-value export supply chains has come at the expense of small family farmers who provide much of the food on which the Senegalese people depend. We should spend more effort seeing how best to strengthen and integrate these local supply chains, which benefit so many local producers. The PRACAS project (to rebuild and accelerate Senegalese agriculture) has been at the centre of the PSE, but is now being reassessed to deal better with these problems. But there is much more needed from the political discourse to recognize that family farming is indeed the main engine for modernizing this

sector in Senegal and that family-based businesses are at the heart of the country's economic and social development.

This is ever more important, given that COVID has demonstrated the great vulnerability of the current economic model, characterized by high levels of external dependence. That's why the initial Priority Action Plan (PAP) of the PSE has been replaced with an Adjusted and Accelerated PAP designed around a new narrative focused on endogenous development, underpinned by the need to attain sovereign control over food, health, and pharmaceutical supplies. A strong domestic private sector is key to delivering this. One of the main lessons we've learned from COVID is there are limits to multilateralism, as we've seen with the arrival of the pandemic. Developed countries turn inwards, competing amongst themselves over supplies of medical products and equipment. I think no one will forget, in the early stage of the crisis, the surreal sight of two rich countries fighting over cargo containing face masks.

Regardless of the discourse about solidarity amongst nations, we have to acknowledge that when times get tough, when rich countries raise the flag of solidarity towards poorer nations, it is only at half-mast. We can see it clearly now with what people are calling "vaccine nationalism", with developed countries arguing over who has rights over available vaccines. Meanwhile, African countries have been largely alone in their efforts to gain supplies. In Senegal, like elsewhere on the continent, vaccines are arriving drop-by-drop. So as of the end of March 2021, we have a little over 500,000 doses for an estimated need of 7-8 million doses required to vaccinate the most vulnerable people in our society. We face a long road ahead. I think it's likely to continue like this for quite a while, so let us hope that the virus will not become more deadly in the meantime. In effect, it is highly probable that Africa will not gain access to sufficient doses to protect the population. Everyone knows it, and richer nations are thinking of themselves before others.

The situation we find ourselves in has nevertheless the advantage of making it crystal clear that we need to re-think our priorities in Africa. Take Senegal, where the road to health sovereignty needs to pass through investment in health technology and the development of a domestic pharmaceutical industry. This cannot happen overnight, but the situation has forced many people to think hard. The second question relates to food self-sufficiency. Fortunately, we did not face a crisis on this front

during the pandemic, but it could have been very serious if, for example, trade in food produce on international markets had been badly disrupted.

This has made us relive the situation we went through during the triple crisis of 2007-09 when finance, food, and the building industry went through a massive boom and bust. Taking lessons from this, we need to reinvest in agriculture, especially family farming, so that food self-sufficiency can be assured. Let's feed ourselves before thinking about feeding others. The third issue is the role of the informal sector, which suffered very badly during the crisis, despite being the largest employer of people in towns and cities across the country. It's been a real boon for the government since it welcomes all those who have been left by the wayside as they can't find work in the formal sector. So, the government should be paying it a lot more attention. It should stop thinking of it as the default option and consider how best to make it a more attractive choice. As I have already mentioned, the informal sector has undergone major changes in its social composition. Before, you found mainly seasonal migrants from rural areas, but today it accommodates lots of people with university education and other professional training. So, we need to change the perception of it. It needs to gain greater recognition and be better organized in order to appeal to younger people. The government could support its development by strengthening institutions and incentives and ceasing to see it just as a potential source of new tax revenue, which leads many in the informal sector to believe that "formalization" is just a means to be taxed more heavily.

The other area for reflection concerns the tourist sector, which has been among the worst hit by the COVID crisis. Tourism has been completely blocked because most visitors came from developed countries. When tourism is shut down, this generates multiple impacts on many other parts of the economy – crafts, farming, fishing, transport, etc. We need to think about how to re-create the tourism sector and the model on which it is based to make many of the products and services more appealing to local and regional visitors.

We shouldn't forget that COVID-19 has also exacerbated levels of vulnerability which were already widespread across society. It is true that the state has put in place a number of mechanisms and programs to address these issues, but it represents a very major task. We should remember that the 2nd pillar of the PSE is intended to build human capital, social protection, and sustainable development. In

so far as social protection is concerned, there are a number of payments made to the poorest families, such as the grant of 25,000FCFA every three months, which is conditional on children under 5 being vaccinated and children being sent to school. There is also the universal health care cover which has allowed families unable to take out regular health insurance schemes to gain access to low-cost health-care. There are also other schemes focused on help to specific groups, such as the handicapped.

The government has put in place an Urgent Community Development Plan to address the big gaps in investment in public services and infrastructure between different regions, with a particular focus on rural areas. It aims to fast-track funding of water supply systems, health care, electricity supply, and transport to help open up more remote zones. Other initiatives are targeting peripheral frontier areas and offering help for young people and women to gain access to markets, under the general principle of leaving no one behind.

As discussed before, these different initiatives have commendable objectives, but they leave a lot to be desired in how they're carried out. First, take the question of how to target these measures, in the absence of good quality data which is sufficiently disaggregated to village level; or the risks of politicization associated with the selection of beneficiaries, as criticized by some. Then there is the question of how pertinent and effective certain technical choices have been, which do not always correspond with what people want and need. For example, there have been cases reported in which villages without electrical power have been provided with equipment that runs on electricity. Also, there is the general bias that assumes that poor access to social services is most acute in rural areas. While this may be true in general, you have to recognize that some big towns and cities harbour substantial pockets where people live precarious lives, with very limited access to water, sanitation, and electrical power.

When there is flooding in these neglected urban margins, people can do little. I think there is a sort of blindness towards vulnerability and marginalization in urban areas. There is then the issue of monitoring and evaluation, because, in the case of most initiatives, there is no systematic follow-up, with just a few partial accounts given by those responsible for the implementation of these activities. There are these questions about targeting, and the need to change perspective regarding where the greatest vulnerability lies.

These are some of the issues – and there are others – which emerge from the COVID crisis. This means we need to think of public policy as it was before COVID and how it needs to be post-COVID.

You have talked about investments that have failed to generate sufficient social dividends for the people of Senegal. The government hopes that the recent discoveries of oil and gas will provide much-needed revenue. In your view, how might the country protect itself from the widely discussed “resource curse”, and plan for more sustainable development and clean energy?

There has been a lot of discussion in Senegal about these petrol finds, and it is true that until the oil starts to actually flow, everything we hear and read can be marked down as good intentions. Putting on one side what one hears, and even the legal framework intended to manage these resources, we could say that there is at least an interest in transparency to avoid the resource curse. Senegal is a signatory to the EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative), which requires member states to publish details of earnings from different mining operations and how the revenue has been distributed. Legal requirements regarding local content means that companies are required to buy Senegalese goods and services and to employ Senegalese staff, where these are available and of the right quality. Even if this law demonstrates a certain adherence to the principle of local benefit from the nation’s resources, the true test will be whether and how the revenues generated by oil and gas actually bring benefits to the Senegalese people.

There’s been a debate about the establishment of an inter-generational fund but, in reality, the future of subsequent generations needs to be built now, and should take the form of a solid economy, built with long term sustainability in mind, buttressed by strong institutions which guarantee transparency in the use of public funds. This seems a better way to ensure a more promising future for our young people. Let’s invest in the right kind of economy now, by constructing institutions that enable the economy to generate revenues from which can grow a sufficiently stable and resilient set of economic activities.

Taking this perspective, it is vital to ensure that revenues from oil and gas support a regionally balanced pattern of economic and social development. This is even more important given the talk of the “territorialization” of public policy. This means putting the local government at the heart of design and implementation of development strategies because you cannot think of solving

problems of employment just by focusing on urban centres, and on the classic private sector. It’s too simplistic and unrealistic. We need to find ways of making rural areas more attractive to young people and for the growth of SMEs.

In order to do this, the role of local government must be re-thought, above all their powers in managing natural resources in their zone, but also the creation of different forms of incentives to attract investments that might create local jobs, whether in farming, livestock-keeping, fishing, or craftwork, by putting a stronger emphasis on developing value chains linking producers to markets. Local people need support in gaining firm and secure access to land and assets with which to become more prosperous and build wealth. Without such measures, it will not be easy for the economic opportunities open to women and youth to be properly supported. We must work with local governments to identify and strengthen the economic potential of local actors.

If we fail to do this, we risk seeing land increasingly acquired by powerful national and international interests leading to growing conflict between them and local people; with the right accompanying measures, local actors can make productive use of this land rather than see it alienated for others to exploit.

Finally, we need to help young people invest in a range of new sectors. Take the digital economy, which is growing fast in Senegal. Lots of young people have gone into this sector, and given the speed of expansion, the potential in terms of growth in employment is enormous. Let’s put in place ambitious training programs, research, infrastructural construction, and incubation hubs. Senegal has the advantage of a strong telecommunications network compared with neighbouring countries. Let’s make profitable use of this advantage.

But with the prospect of oil and gas revenues, we mustn’t forget our moral obligation to contribute to the fight against climate change, and the need to follow a growth model which privileges sustainability and clean energy. Senegal has been pursuing a mixed energy model, with a growing share of electricity coming from green sources. Today, the country is at about 20% of electricity from renewable sources, with an objective of 30% in the short term. With oil and gas in the offing, we mustn’t see the abandonment of this progress, because not only is this a valuable contribution to addressing climate change, but these new forms of energy offer a considerable number of jobs and are

very well-suited to a rapid roll-out of energy access, especially in distant areas which have little prospect of getting onto the main grid network.

Sidiki Diarra, Mali: “How COVID-19 Is Impacting Rural Africans in the Sahel” May 2021.

In this interview, Sidiki Diarra and Camilla Toulmin explore the different ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic affects the lives of ordinary



Africans. This provides a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic at the very local level and how the health emergency adds to both economic and security challenges in the West African Sahel. Sidiki Diarra, research assistant for Camilla Toulmin, interviews a group of young men in Mali’s capital Bamako who have migrated from the village of Dlonguebougou, Ségou Region and are now settled in the city.

We’re here to listen to your news, find out about your life in Bamako, and get ideas about how conditions in the village of Dlonguebougou could improve. First, the Covid-19 pandemic has spread across the world, causing a lot of damage and deaths. How has it affected you?

Ever since this disease was announced twelve months ago, we haven’t known of anyone, either here in town or in the village, who has succumbed. Nevertheless, we’ve all been careful about following the government’s advice and wearing masks. This meeting today is the first we have gone to in a long time. We’ve all changed our patterns of behaviour – no more hand-shaking and being face to face. But it’s difficult to respect all the hygiene measures when you’re living so close to everyone else. A number of us have had problems because of not being able to travel to look for work, but now we’re much freer to move around, though many of the frontiers are still shut. The schools have been disrupted so those of us who work as teachers have had a lot of trouble, since the classes we’ve been teaching have been suspended.

Money is certainly scarcer and work is harder to find. The factory where one of us works had to shut for a bit because it could neither export its product nor import the inputs it needed. At times you wonder if the disease is imaginary.... They say

COVID has caused a worldwide economic crisis. But if you’ve not actually seen anyone who’s affected, it’s hard to understand. We hear in the media of the top politicians and VIPs who are reported to be COVID positive. While we have seen very little of it directly, we’ve certainly all been suffering from the economic consequences.

Now tell us about the school in Dlonguebougou. We heard it had been forced to shut.

There is no more talk of school - it’s completely finished. It was shut by the jihadists two years ago. Across the whole commune of Doura, and further north to Sagalaba and west to Touba, the schools are all shut. A few *medersas* (Islamic schools) have opened up in some of the schools where French used to be taught. When they came to shut the school, they threatened the teacher with death, but thankfully the pupils protected him. The jihadists tried to rough him up, but the pupils encircled him and got him out of the building and away. But they burnt all the books, pens, school bags, and teaching materials. My niece was in school that day and tried to escape with her school bag, but they slapped her and took the bag away for burning. That day, two sons of the village chief went to protest loudly. The jihadists said they had nothing against the villagers, but the school had to shut and the teachers must go. The villagers argued that it’s they who pay the teachers, so when you attack them, you’re also attacking the villagers, but they took no notice. Our school was a community school and village people paid the teachers’ salaries. Those families with the means can send their child to school in Bamako, or wherever else the schools are still open, but for most families, that’s the end of schooling for their children.

We heard that there are many jihadists in the region. How does their presence affect daily life in the village?

The jihadists have created an enormous set of problems for the village. Some people have had to move away because they feel vulnerable to attack. Take the case of G and N, who have had to move to the city because they both had such a powerful reputation as fortune-tellers (an activity associated with traditional, non-Islamic practices). Traditional festivals, like the dance of the masks at harvest time, and large marriage celebrations have been banned. They don’t allow drumming, so weddings have become more like funerals. And we’ve been forbidden to hold large meetings in the village. The jihadists don’t live in the village but are camped many kilometres away towards the north, but visit from time to time. People are frightened even of

holding small meetings in case someone might inform the jihadists. Even amongst ourselves, the Bambara, we have become careful and cautious, and more so with the Peul (also known as the Fulani, a livestock-keeping group spread across West Africa). Despite this, the village chief continues to hold his regular meetings with family heads, but they tend to be short. We haven't been targeted by the jihadists, apart from the school being shut down. Other villages seem to have been worse affected, with them turning up to lay down the law. We try to follow these laws in advance of being dictated to.

However, on the positive side, the number of animal thefts has definitely gone down, and they have also imposed a ban on tree-cutting, which is certainly necessary. For stealing cattle, the first time they come and warn you, the second time they kill you. Once or twice, they have walked through the village with their guns, but our old folk sat down with them and asked them – in a very polite way – to stop this sort of behaviour. We've heard that they have started imposing the *zakat* (an Islamic tax) on the Peul, so they have to give one-tenth of their herd in taxation. The Bambara have not been asked for this, so far.

The thing to do is to manage your language carefully and avoid confrontation. There is no problem as regards Allah between us, but they really don't want you to speak well of government. Currently, there is no government presence in Doura (the commune headquarters), neither the *sous-préfet*, the mayor, nor the technical services – they have all gone – so there is no form of administration for the entire commune. The only solution seems to be to bring in the army to provide security for the whole area. No individual or village can take steps, since they'll come and kill you at home. Did you hear about the case of T in the neighbouring village? They suspected he had been giving information to the army, so they went into his house and killed him in front of his family.

The jihadists also play the role of judge. There was a woman who had refused to accept her husband following their marriage. He went to ask the jihadis for help, so they went and found the woman, spoke to her severely, brought her back to the husband, and gave her strict advice. They are now the rulers of our area, they're the kings, the masters of the zone.

There is not too much difficulty traveling about during the day, but you don't want to travel at night. And any work at night is forbidden. If you going to a neighbouring village, you need to travel in a group of 2 or 3, whereas before we could go singly on foot,

by cycle, or motorbike without any problem. Before, a woman could set off by herself with a donkey cart to look for wood without needing any accompaniment. But now women go and look for firewood in a group. Then there are some bandits who use the insecurity for their own purposes. At first, they would attack a herder out with the cattle, and take a number of them, so no one wanted to lead the herd to pasture anymore. But it's a bit better now. I have the impression there are fewer jihadists around right now, and they know of our village's reputation and power, so they are also a bit frightened of us.

What news of the last farming season? We heard there was a lot of rain. Did that bring a good harvest?

The recent harvest has been mixed but overall, it was very poor, with not enough millet to feed people for the year ahead. You'll remember we cultivate large bush fields with a long cycle millet – *sanyo*, and village fields with a shorter cycle millet – *sunan*. Most families harvested *sanyo*, but many fields planted with *sunan* got nothing. Since the harvest is not enough to last 12 months, we have stored in the granary enough to cover our food needs during the next farming season, to make sure the weeding team has enough to eat. Right now, everyone is left to their own devices, that's our strategy for managing a bad harvest like this one. Last year, many more people gained enough grain to feed themselves, but not this year. Some people will have a bit left from last year, which will help stretch supplies for this year.

We certainly had a lot of rain this year, too much rain in fact, which damaged the crops. Our soils don't do well with a lot of rain. Rain for two or three days, that's OK but day after day – there is not enough heat in the soil to help the millet plant develop. Each year, the harvest is smaller and smaller. Every year we say "last year was better than this". This year, for example, in our family we made 4 trips to carry the harvest back from the threshing ground to home, rather than the expected 17-20 trips. You see the difference? It must have to do with how we farm, as well as the nature of our soils, which are tired, they have no more strength in them.

The abundance of rainfall is bad, especially because the soils have lost their fertility. Look around and you see that many of our young people are no longer in the village, so who is fetching manure from the cattle pens to spread on the fields? If this no longer happens, it's no surprise the harvest is poor. The sesame harvest was especially bad, and the little we've been able to harvest is hard to sell,

because the buyers who used to come to the village don't want to risk being caught by the jihadists.

The village has become much poorer, there is little left of the bush which used to surround the settlement. It's become like a desert as all the trees have been cut down. Villagers have been getting money from chopping wood for cooking and making charcoal, so all the big trees have now gone. How can we live like this? At this time of year, we should be seeing the sweet-smelling jasmine in the woodlands around Farakaye! But men young and old need to make money. You can't just sit at home. People need something to do in the dry season, like having irrigated vegetable plots to cultivate, but we need a big deep well to get enough water for this kind of activity.

In the past, you've had a lot of migrant farmers coming to the village seeking land to cultivate. Are they still coming?

We still have a lot of migrant farmers coming to seek our land, due to the big Chinese sugar cane plantation N-Sukala which took the fields of so many villages, they have no land left to farm. There are even more incomers today because they know they can find refuge with us. There are some who pass the farming season here, and others who have decided to settle permanently. There was a time when our village council sent all the migrant farmers packing, but we had to let them come back. We have so many ties of marriage between our villages, it's not possible to send them away for good.

We have the impression that these incomers get better harvests than we do, but it is not clear why. The soils are the same, but maybe they have different ways of farming. We have a lot more farm equipment than we used to, yet the yields seem to fall every year. We've been cultivating enormous areas, much bigger than in the past, but the millet plants are often quite a distance apart when you come to harvest time. In the past, each field was much more densely packed with millet plants. Some of the biggest fields today are probably one square km in size, but despite this, we don't harvest what you might hope.

How do you find life in Bamako, and how does it compare with living in the village?

Life in Bamako is definitely better than in the village. We can earn a better living here. In the village, it's only in the farming season that you have any work. Apart from that, there is nothing to do. In the past, we used to just come for the dry season to Bamako, having finished all the farming tasks. But

now, the harvest is so poor, we've decided to stay here and send help to our families in the bush when they need it. What we make here can complement what is produced in the village. Our parents are happy for us to stay here as we can help them out. Of course, if there was enough to eat in the village, it would be good to live there. Life in Bamako is very expensive, especially if you don't have a proper job that pays you a good wage. In the past, we really ate well in the village – couscous, *tô*, *dégé*, and many other millet dishes, but it's not like that today. With food scarce, and insecurity due to the jihadists, life in the village has become miserable.

So you see Bamako is a lot better. However, here in the city, none of us owns his own house, we're all renting somewhere to live. It's very expensive, especially for people with limited means. We should be buying land and building a house, but instead, if you've got a little cash, people use it to pay for a big motorbike, a radio, and to live the high life!

The weekly market in Dlonguebougou, which was set up seven years ago, instead of being a blessing, has cursed the village and led to the massive cutting of wood and making of charcoal. Some men will spend 4 or 5 nights in the bush seeking wood to cut, so they can bring it to the market on Wednesdays. If you were to compare a photo from the past with today, you would see how extraordinary it is, that all the trees have disappeared. How could we imagine that the bush would become empty? Women have to spend the whole day looking for something to cook with. How can we escape this calvary? There has been no attempt to re-forest the village lands, so we've got increasing problems to find both animal fodder and firewood. The animals start to die of hunger in April and May before the rains bring new pastures. There have also been bush fires that destroy all the grazing.

As for those of us who have had an education, we leave the village to look for jobs, as there is no hope of wages in the village, so how will you earn enough even to buy tea? Life in the village can also be difficult. If you have any money, you fear someone will steal it from you, especially the bandits. They can easily attack you either at home or when you're traveling about. If you have a new motorbike, you can only ride it within the settlement, never between villages because you fear having it taken from you.

What are some of the jobs you're doing in Bamako to make a living?

There are many forms of work people do here.

Some find a job in one of the factories. K is working in a kiosk “Orange Money”, and at the same time sells petrol, and does some teaching in a private school. Some people earn money as ambulant traders, such as selling pharmaceutical products. A common job used to be *finigosi*, which involves beating thick satin cloth, to acquire a fine sheen, especially when it’s been dyed with indigo. But this activity has almost completely disappeared because the Chinese are importing a form of satin cloth that already has a fine sheen. Consequently, the women cloth-traders don’t need us anymore. Then there is selling bread, which many people do, walking the streets to find customers. You can also earn a living by selling second-hand clothing. One of us has a job in a company making fruit juices.

It’s difficult for those of us who are students coming to the end of our training courses. One of us has done the training to be a teacher and has a job in a private school but must combine this with working nights as a guard in order to earn enough money to live. Everyone is trying to find a mix of things to do. One of us has inherited a sewing machine and can use this to earn a bit of extra money. Haulage of goods is another way to earn an income, either with a van or a scooter. If you have special learning, you can become a marabout, like X who has been in Bamako for more than 10 years, having learned the trade from his father who was well-known with a good reputation. A successful consultation with a client seeking advice can bring a good return. When you first arrive, you may find work with a builder who needs an assistant. If you have a solar panel, you can sell electricity. If you go to the village right now, you won’t find a single young person there – they have all left to look for money – apart from two or three who are rebuilding houses and doing other essential household works. If they are not here in Bamako, they’re looking for gold.

Many of our young men continue to go to the place known as Damanda, where people dig for gold. What’s for sure is that if you manage to find gold and make some money, you’ll never leave, because you’re tempted to stay and look for more. You end up having spent your time and money there, leave with nothing, and keep going back. There’s a lot of chance involved. T had a young brother last year who had really good luck. On his return from Damanda, he was able to buy two motorbikes each costing 500,000FCFA^[1] and had another 500,000FCF in his pocket. But most people never manage to earn these sums.

Across the Sahel, there have been conflicts and confrontations between farmers like the Bambara

and herders like the Peul. How are the relations between Peul and Bambara around DBG?

Everyone is much more suspicious between Bambara and Peul, and even amongst Bambara themselves. Knowing how to speak, and controlling what you say, are most important to avoid disputes. We’re very careful about what we discuss, and don’t go in for the kind of joking together we used to do.

As you know, many of the Peuls have been living amongst us for generations. There has been little or no marriage between our groups, but there is a certain mutual respect. There is a lot of shared history, since before we were born, so we cannot evict them from the land. Some problems exist between us, but we grew up together. These problems always exist between farmers and herders. The many Peuls that come from much further away, who used to visit DBG in the dry season, no longer come in any numbers. There is greater suspicion between us, but no one is seeking a fight. When they’re around, we’re careful about what we say and talk in code, so they cannot understand our meaning. But local Peuls, we’ve known each other for many years.

What are the most important priorities for the village?

The village faces a number of challenges which we want resolved.

- First is the poor telephone reception. We need a telephone mast. It is absolutely essential for life today, such as for sending cash by Orange-Money. If you go back to the village for a couple of weeks to visit the family, you miss calls from your clients who were wanting to book you for transport or other services. The phone signal is just too weak.
- Then there is the massive destruction of our trees. Everyone has been relying on wood-cutting to make a little income but it’s disastrous for us all and must stop. We need to re-forest our landscape too and make sure there is enough grazing and forage for our animals.
- The farming system is in trouble, with year after year of falling harvests, so we need help to find a way to grow better crops. We’d like to develop an area for irrigated fruit and vegetables – say 5 hectares – including some fruit trees. But for that, we need to dig a big, deep well that won’t dry up in the dry season.
- The area needs better roads so you can get to market more quickly and easily, especially in the rainy season when cars and trucks get stuck in the mud.

- In terms of services, people's health matters a lot. The clinic is very run down and needs money and better staff. We want our school to be up and running again, but for that we need to get rid of the jihadis.

Perhaps we could get some of our young folk trained by the army, so they could provide enough protection for us to fight off the jihadis. A number of villages in our zone are protected by their hunters' association (*donzo*), but they don't have enough modern equipment to be really effective.

Another option would be to build a factory in Bamako, some kind of enterprise that could employ young people from the village. In this way, they could find work and earn enough to be able to save money and re-invest it in the village. There are people from many different villages here in Bamako, each with their own association. If we could organize ourselves, there is a lot we could do. As they say, it's not possible for one person to move a large rock but together many things are possible.

With thanks to Sidiki Diarra Interviewer Dialakorodji, Bamako; Mme Berthé Assan Traoré transcription, Dialakorodji, Bamako. From Dlonguebougou now living in Bamako: Hambé Diarisso, Dounamba Dembélé, Dramane Tangara, Madou Diarisso, Bina Toungara, Bakary Tangara, Moulaye Tangara, Babilé Tangara, Maman Dembélé, Niancoro Toungara, Seriba Dembélé, Cheickna Dembélé, Molobaly Dembélé, Bakoroba Diarra, Kony Dembélé, Bassi Tangara, Tiémoko Tangara, and Tiéké Dembélé.

Camilla Toulmin's book on the village of Dlonguebougou *Land, Investment and Migration: Thirty-five years of village life in Mali* was published by Oxford University Press in 2020.

Note

[1] 500,000CFA Francs = US\$900

Kandeh Yumkella, The Energy Nexus Network and MP in Sierra Leone: "COVID-19 Has Helped People Understand the Vital Connection Between Energy and Health" June 2021.

Dr Kandeh Yumkella is a development economist, founder and CEO of The Energy Nexus Network (TENN), a regional hub for sustainable energy solutions and serves as a Member of Parliament in



Sierra Leone. Previously Dr Yumkella served as Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All and founding chief executive officer for the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) Initiative (2013–2015). He also served as Director-General of the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO, 2005–2013), mobilising global consensus for SDG7 and 9. He is a member of the High-Level Group of the Africa-Europe Foundation, co-chair of the Africa Europe Foundation Strategy Group on Energy, and member of various international advisory bodies, boards, and commissions.

As you are the member of Parliament for Kambia in the northwest of Sierra Leone, tell us how this part of the country has been hit by the COVID pandemic and how it has managed to cope over the last 12 months.

When COVID started we were really scared in the northwest, in Kambia and its region. The fact is that our neighbour, Guinea, and its capital Conakry had large COVID numbers even before we had the first case in Sierra Leone. We were concerned for two reasons. Kambia is one of the closest points to Guinea and is only 2-3 hours from Conakry. It's the main crossing point between Sierra Leone and Guinea. So, our proximity to Guinea scared the hell out of us. Second, we remembered our bad Ebola experience which we inherited from Guinea, which made us panic further.

As Member of Parliament for the Kambia region, I and my MP colleagues started quickly with a programme of sensitization, even before the first case was logged in Sierra Leone. My constituency, in particular, is very porous. We have over 40 crossing points into Guinea and a lot of them are no more than bush paths. We had to set up youth groups to help control the crossing points and, despite the worry, we did not actually get large numbers of infections. Somehow those initial measures counted, helped by the fact that Sierra Leone closed the borders.

To deal with the large number of illegal crossing points, we mobilised quickly the military and police, and organised trips with them to go to the different crossing points. I sensitised villages and chiefs along the length of the border, so they became aware of the problem. And the military on both sides were very vigilant. In spite of those scares, our numbers stayed relatively low, and they remain low. We don't know how to explain this - perhaps that early sensitization work, the handwashing, plus the social distancing. The Ebola experience probably made people a little bit more compliant with instructions

and regulations from government. Kambia had a curfew imposed long before any other place in the country, from 6pm in the evening till 7am in the morning. This stayed in place for quite a long time, so much so that some of my constituents were complaining and asking for it to be lifted. But we didn't allow it because we were watching the numbers in Conakry, which were really high in comparison with Sierra Leone.

On the health front we have fared relatively well so far, but the economic impacts have been more serious because of the lockdown. The farming sector was affected and we will have to wait to see the survey numbers to see how badly it has been hit. There is no doubt the lockdown brought hard times. We have the largest international market in the country in Kambia, which attracts traders from Guinea, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Liberia, which is called Barmoi Luma. Luma means "community market" in my home language. On a good day we estimate more than 20,000 people come and mingle. There are huge trucks from Mali and Senegal buying our produce. People still do barter trade of commodities. Shutting the border and restrictions on movement badly affected people there in terms of jobs and incomes.

It is mainly an agricultural area growing rice and, because there is a very long coastline, there is a lot of fishing too. My constituency has 67,000 people and Kambia District as a whole 350,000 residents. While we rely a lot on fish for food and proteins, there are also groundnuts, maize, cashew, cassava - the second main staple - and palm oil. Vegetables matter too, and we grow a lot of peppers and aubergine. These vegetables find their way to Conakry, which some people estimate may have as many as 3.5 or 4 million people, so it's a really big market, almost 50% of Sierra Leone's total population and we're close by. As a result, a lot of what we grow, most of all our rice, fish and palm oil goes to Conakry.

What is the situation in Sierra Leone with vaccine availability? And are people willing to be vaccinated or is there a lot of hesitancy?

There is both hesitancy and denial as regards COVID and the vaccine, because our numbers are so low. A recent US travel advisory note put us amongst the four lowest worldwide in terms of prevalence. A lot of people in my constituency don't believe COVID is real. They also joke that it is a "white man's problem" and it cannot affect them. So, there is denial that COVID even exists. I myself also wanted to wait a few months until the vaccines were proven. I finally got my first vaccine this week.

Rollout started three months ago, and it is only now I have chosen to have the vaccination. Look at me - I am well-educated, well-aware of the trade-offs and have good information. I was certainly a bit hesitant. I am not sure about the absolute numbers but all of the vaccine we have here came in through COVAX, the initiative of the World Health Organisation. We got AstraZeneca through this channel, then the Chinese brought their own vaccine in, and we then got a second lot of AstraZeneca from COVAX. The President and the Ministers did well to take it at State House, in a televised ceremony. Some of us sceptics did not show up. The rollout has been smooth because the numbers of people volunteering for injections are few so far. They have done a reasonably good job in putting supplies in each of the main district headquarters. Even Kambia has had its share. While it has been a small amount to start with, we'll need a lot more now.

Part of what pushed me to take mine, as a member of the elite, is because people like me have now become scared of the Indian (or Delta) variant. They had been saying our hot climate protects us from COVID. But the experience of India and Brazil kills the myth about hot weather. It has been fear of the Indian variant that scared us to go and get it done. Second, is the worry that we will be faced with the need to get a vaccine passport for travel, and this made some of us realise we need to get vaccinated now. I have friends who say "hey, if I don't get it now, I may not be able to travel for business or other reasons to Europe, US or Asia". The roll out is going well but we need a lot more. We've had a miniscule supply, and there are also concerns about cold-storage. When I took mine, I had two days of fever but nothing really serious, and the third day, it cleared, and I now feel fine and well. But there has been fear about proper storage. And that links to the energy system, as we have power outages for as many as 6 hours a day. There is a big worry about efficacy of the vaccine if the storage system is not good.

You mention energy which has been at the centre of your work over the last 15 years. Has the COVID crisis made you re-think your focus on energy?

The COVID crisis has given even more impetus to all of the energy-related issues that I have been advocating over the last nearly two decades. Fifteen years ago, we had one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, and the highest infant mortality rate in the world. My cousin who was doing a survey for DFID ten years ago showed that much of this was due to lack of electric power in

some of the clinics, while a lot of deliveries were done at night without electric light - they use candlelight. When COVID hit, you could immediately see the potential link between sickness and vaccine cold-chains, powered by grid electricity or renewable energy, to keep temperatures sub-zero. We've been telling the world for the last two decades that energy is critical to achieving all the other SDGs, especially health service delivery. The COVID pandemic has, if anything, inspired me further. I did an article in February arguing that [effective vaccine delivery was closely tied to the availability of renewable energy](#), because I cannot see how they will store the vaccines in my village without solar power. And because it came out just after the US President's inauguration, I said "President Biden, this could be your new foreign policy. If you want to democratise vaccine distribution, you also need to drive the spread of renewable energy to all corners, all communities."

How has the rollout of investment in energy been affected by the COVID crisis and associated economic downturn?

The COVID pandemic has had several impacts on the energy sector. The first impact, even before any cases actually hit Africa, was an immediate drop in demand for oil and gas. So those countries, like Nigeria, Angola and others, were immediately hit, in the first few weeks of COVID appearing in Asia, Europe and America. Demand immediately dropped which also then affected related investments in prospecting and expansion of the oil and gas industry. Second was lowering of the demand for electricity, especially in the more industrialised African countries. Factories shut when there is a lock down. Third was the inability of consumers to pay their bills. In neighbouring Guinea, the president offered to pay people's utility bills because lockdown meant people did not have any money. We did not do that in Sierra Leone, but a number of other countries considered that measure. Lockdown has badly hit utility companies. Investments have also not been coming in. The International Energy Agency estimated already by January or February this year that there had been a 30% drop in energy investments in Africa, and this is for a continent with the lowest rate of access to energy already in the world. As a result, you can imagine how these multiple factors have impacted the energy sector. We hope things may improve in the post-COVID period. We hope that governments in Africa and elsewhere can understand the critical nexus between access to energy and social service delivery - clean water and health services - as well as food and agriculture. We hope it has made them

understand the connections. But there is another bigger problem. 85% of people in sub-Saharan Africa (outside South Africa) rely on charcoal and fuelwood for cooking, which is causing household air pollution and pulmonary problems. We worry that underlying pulmonary problems for women, children and men as well could make them more vulnerable to another wave of COVID. The WHO has been doing studies in India and elsewhere to see if there is any correlation between air pollution in general and COVID susceptibility. We'll see what comes out in the next few months and from household studies in Africa.

How might you get more investment, both domestic and foreign, coming into energy generation and distribution?

In my own country, and others I know well, corruption is very high. Energy sector governance has to be re-vamped. That's a big catch-all phrase which covers many things, like honesty around running the power utility well. This includes revenue collection, billing processes, and pay as you go - digitalisation could help all of these as it did for mobile phones. Regulations and public policy all have to be consistent, predictable and long term. The government has to have commitment to longer term solutions, instead of relying on a "fire-brigade quick fix". My country is so guilty of quick fixes - we're still relying on emergency power provided by Turkey's Karpower ship, which the government party criticised when in opposition, but they've done just the same. They've extended the contract. As a result, we're going to have emergency power supply in Freetown for ten years. But if you look at those last ten years, Rwanda more than doubled access to electricity in that time, because they were focused on long term solutions. The energy sector is so corrupt, you need to go in for brutal governance reforms to bring effectiveness and transparency into the sector. Successive governments want to do quick fixes and make money under the table. We must have sector governance reform - if you fix it, there is predictability and maybe some companies will come and partner with you.

Second, we need to get the utilities to perform. They are such big gatekeepers in the system that when they are corrupt and inefficient, they mess up everything else in the energy sector. Third, we must find ways to support the regulators, many of whom are new in sub-Saharan Africa. Many have been operating for less than ten years, so they're still trying to learn their role as regulators. The "unbundling process" for energy supply is recent and not complete in a number of African countries.

Another critical factor is proper planning. A number of us are advocating for an integrated energy planning framework. This is an idea we have been pursuing in the Global Commission to End Energy Poverty launched by the Rockefeller Foundation, African Development Bank and MIT. A number of us from Africa are part of this Commission and promoting the idea of a clear framework for planning the integration of energy systems across several dimensions. For example, make sure that when you plan for on-grid, you plan for off-grid too, including mini-grids. Good geo-spatial mapping is a big help, so that potential investors can come in and see, for example, that they can deliver to the whole northern region. Population densities are known, and income levels are known, so the investor would not need to do detailed background research himself.

Integration is also critical for developing other sectors properly, if we're going to do sector-coupling, which is so essential for a country like mine which relies on minerals. When we design mining policy for a country like mine, let the Energy Minister be part of the negotiations and consider how those mining companies can become anchor-centres for energy demand, or potential private sector power producers. Because every mining company which comes to Sierra Leone also builds their own power-generating plant. But with good planning, they could be part of a private company's energy supply under a guaranteed Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), and meanwhile they can also supply the community. Maybe out of corporate social responsibility they could even cross-subsidise energy access for the communities around the mining site. So, we need integrated public policy for energy and mines, energy and health which we were discussing earlier, and strategic planning for energy utilities so that they think about the likely future demand from using electricity for cooking, as an additional demand centre.

Finally, one of the neglected areas which we have tried to document in the Global Commission to End Energy Poverty and the work I did two years ago for the European Commission is the lack of investment in distribution systems. We have that situation here in Sierra Leone. The president made a speech a few weeks ago in which he stated that, under his administration, over the last three years he has increased significantly the availability of electricity in the capital. Even in the well of parliament, we all started laughing. Why? We have more power outages today than we had a month ago, or 6 months ago. He went on to explain that the reason there have been problems is that we inherited an

antiquated distribution network. In the reports we have been doing, we say let's find ways to bring investment into independent power producers, and its probably also time we develop business models for independent distribution providers. Some countries are making big investments in power generation, but the transformers and the power lines are not there. The interconnections between our cities do not exist. In Sierra Leone we have one of the worst inter-district connections – in fact we only have 3 lines - in a country where you have 14 districts, each of which has its own independent connection. Distribution has been a neglected area for a long time. And of course, finally, finance matters. Getting more investment in de-risking these investments using ODA, all of that depends on good sector governance.

Foreign direct investment is one obvious source of capital for energy. But what about domestic sources of capital? How can you tap into these?

We need to strengthen the capacity of local banks to invest in the energy sector. I can speak for my own country - we don't have banks able to support energy investment, whether its renewables, mini-grids or whatever. Maybe its different in some of the biggest economies like Nigeria. Capacity building and seed financing are needed. Let's put this in context. When the Iron Curtain fell, the European Investment Bank had to train bankers in eastern Europe how to structure deals and energy efficiency projects. That's how they grew that market. When I was leading SE4ALL, I visited EBRD and they would tell stories about the first few banks they were training in eastern Europe to retrofit people's apartments, and also start financing industrial energy efficiency measures. After a few years other banks came into the market. And it's a \$40b market now. A group of funders had to invest in capacity building - KfW, EBRD and EIB - it took time to help make those markets grow. It's the same in Africa. We need to help build capital markets with deep pockets that are able to take the risks to expand power production, and power trade.

One issue which I need to mention is encouraging power trade. Some of our countries are too small to bring in big investments in power generation. Twelve years ago, I was talking to a rich European investor, who had major assets in North Africa and Asia. We met at an event and I said "hey my president is looking for people to invest in 50MW of energy generation". And he said "Mr Yumkella, 50MW may be big for your country and your president but that's not big enough for me to even open an office." He was thinking 500MW or even

1GW – that scale would give him grounds to open an office. And preferably in a place like Cote d'Ivoire with good internet and power connections which allow you to trade power, as also happens a lot in Europe. A number of us are advocating for power trade, and my country is building its first interconnection backbone due to be operational at the end of this year. But that deal took seven years to negotiate. It took another 3 years to set up the company that will run it and provide power between Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire. But with this kind of experience, we now believe we can negotiate these deals in 3 years not 7. And companies then know that instead of supplying Sierra Leone, you'll be supplying 45 million people. The AfCFTA would certainly help with this. There is also a recent study by the Tony Blair Institute and PowerAfrica which shows how much money each country could save if they had good interconnections and energy trading through the power pool. The AfCFTA would certainly make the trade easier and we're advocating for this with Power Africa.

You were formerly DG at UNIDO before SE4ALL, with a particular focus on industrialisation. How does the industrialisation debate look for Africa today? Has the COVID pandemic changed the strategy?

I have made the case for 25 years that Africa has no choice but to industrialise, otherwise we're doomed to be poor for another 50 or 100 years. This is a major reason why I went into the energy space. We were on a call with Secretary Ernest Moniz – Obama's secretary for Energy - with the Global Commission and he made the case for why there is a strong nexus between energy and industrialisation in Africa. We cannot talk about energy transition in a utopian sense as if Africans will suddenly jump into solar. Many people don't want to talk about using gas for power, but it's an injustice for Africa. Moniz and I were on the same page as we both argue that gas is an important transition fuel to enable Africa's industrialisation ambitions but also enable greater deployment of renewables. In many cases, it's not just about energy transition, it's about energy access. My country has 15-20% energy access, so we should certainly look for gas to power solutions. The government here is looking at gas – both liquid natural gas, and liquid petroleum gas - how can anyone tell us not to do that? The bigger context is that Africa's emissions represent 4% of the global total so if you start to talk about carbon budgets, as will be the discussion at COP26, let's remember in Africa we're only using 4% of the global total. So this means that Africa should have some degrees of freedom to use fossil fuel

technologies to save lives and power our economy. We'll make very little impact even if we do use gas. Industrialisation is key. COVID has made us realise even more the importance of this. It has also made us think about the manufacturing of drugs. In our parliament, debate is going on about a convention we're supposed to ratify about harmonising standards across Africa for drugs. As leader of UNIDO, I certainly invested a lot of time on this topic, supported by the Germans above all. At that time, we were supporting generic drugs production for HIV medicines. The context is even more difficult now – some estimate Africa must generate 20 million jobs per year, in my country youth unemployment is 60%, which everywhere is a very big timebomb, which will hit and destabilise us. John Kerry used to talk about this a few years ago, when he was US secretary of state. The youth bulge in Africa is scary. And unless we focus on industrialisation, diversification and digitalisation, I see instability accelerating across a lot of countries. And when you look at more and more draconian governance systems across Africa, I think part of it is fear of the youth. The youth will revolt. I just pray that some of us don't become collateral damage. I spoke about this back in 2008 at the African Union. I told them then that youth are angry, in a very angry undiplomatic speech. Kenya had just had the post-election riots in which they'd massacred almost 1,000 people. That day President Ghaddafi of Libya had moved to suspend AU discussion of industrialisation, despite the fact that we had prepared for months. Luckily, other African leaders backed the industrialisation debate.

How do you see the role of countries outside Africa in this industrialisation process? Some people say China is the best model, others go for the US, or for Europe? Who can be the best partner?

Africa needs all partners. We need to be smart and eclectic, picking what works for us depending on time and context. We need all markets – Chinese, European, American. We want to sell and be part of global value chains, picking our niches of course. One of my friends is Paul Collier and together we have been advising the Lagos Business School Forum. We went back to look at some of the work we did together when I was at UNIDO. The industrialisation we need now is not to produce entire products but to be part of a value chain where you do one bit of a larger chain. There was a big splash when we launched that study. Paul had just produced the book "The Bottom Billion" and we produced some case studies which included one village in China that produces 75% of the buttons that they use in garments in the rest of the world. So

don't think you have to produce the whole jacket, just buttons and labels. They were so good at it, Italians started dismantling their own factories and bringing them to that one location. Africans should look at niche markets producing specialised components that others will buy. Rather than just selling commodities. Our industrialisation has to be by making ourselves relevant in certain value chains and this will vary by geography. It depends on the characteristics of each country, on your human capital, on your natural resources.

If we go back to energy now, Africans should ride the green wave and become producers of components within some technology value chains. We're sitting on 40-50% of the world's cobalt plus manganese, both of which are needed for batteries. South Africa has 70% of the world's platinum group of metals which are needed for fuel cells. All of these metals plus rare earths are critical for the world's transition to clean energy. In short, some of the key metals we need for driving a clean energy revolution, say in hydrogen, are sitting in Africa. If we're talking about a just and fair transition, as is being proposed for COP26, it has to consider Africa's ability to supply many of the key metals needed for the green energy revolution. Whether it is battery storage systems, solar panels, wind turbines or other components, we need to be part of the first and second stage in refining and processing metals, such as coltan, zircon and tantalum. It would be unjust if, with this new green revolution, Africa is left out, or used merely as a source of raw materials. It's not a conspiracy to leave us out but more a question of whether we Africans are ambitious enough to ride this green wave and capture market share. We don't want to be left behind.

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, Mayor of Freetown: "The Ebola Experience Taught Us the Importance of Acting Fast" February 2021.

In this interview, Camilla Toulmin and Folashade Soulé speak with Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, OBE, Mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone.



Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr OBE was sworn-in as Mayor of Freetown in May 2018 with a commitment to transform Freetown using an inclusive, data-driven approach to address challenges in the city. The 3-

year Transform Freetown plan details 19 concrete targets across 11 sectors and covers issues ranging from tackling environmental degradation to facilitating the creation of jobs in the tourism sector. A finance professional with over 25 years of private sector experience in strategic planning, risk management consulting and project management, Mayor Aki-Sawyerr's public sector engagement began with her work during the 2014-2015 Ebola epidemic and her subsequent role in driving socio-economic recovery in Sierra Leone post Ebola. Mayor Aki-Sawyerr is a Chartered Accountant and holds an MSc in Politics of the World Economy from the London School of Economics and a BSc Hons in Economics from Fourah Bay College. She was recently recognized in the BBC 2020 100 Women list.

We've been hearing from people in different parts of Africa about managing the COVID crisis and post-pandemic recovery, at national and international level. But we were really keen to get a perspective from sub-national level. How has the city organised to fight against COVID-19? What are some of the initiatives which you have been able to take at city-level? Knowing how deeply involved you were with the Ebola crisis, what are some of the differences, contrasts, and lessons you learned from the Ebola crisis of relevance for COVID-19?

The Ebola experience taught me the importance of acting fast. It's essential to have a clear plan, and to get people around this strategy, so they have a sense of direction. We called the first city-level emergency COVID-19 meeting in mid-February 2020. This was a good 6 weeks before the first cases were confirmed in Sierra Leone. We brought a wide range of partners together, NGOs, people who'd worked with me on Ebola, and also outside experts, such as a scientist, who does a lot of thinking around epidemiology. By the 16th March we had put together a plan, which reflected the context of Freetown and the experience of Ebola. The plan had three key elements responding to the fact that this is a city where 35% of our populace live in informal settlements which are densely crowded with very little space for social distancing. The significance of informal settlements has been a key narrative in terms of response measures. Another very important feature is the fact that 47% of the population do not have access to running water. Given the other most significant element of protection is hand-washing, our plan needed to reflect these particularities. But we also had learned during the Ebola outbreak the importance of community ownership. People must understand what's going on, and in order to understand they

must not only hear it, but also internalise it. To do this you need trusted sources of information, and a trusted approach. During the Ebola outbreak, a WHO doctor with experience of previous Ebola outbreaks in Africa, said “Yvonne, you’ve got to talk to the people under the mango tree” so we built that into the plan.

Freetown City Council’s preparedness and response plan for COVID-19 therefore has three elements – behaviour change messaging, behaviour change support, and isolation and quarantine support. You can find a copy of our plan on the FCC website. The three elements do exactly what their names suggest. The first question is how to get the message across, so we chose to work with a horizontal approach and a vertical approach. Horizontal meant targeting the entire city at ward level. We have 48 wards in the city, so we worked to have this message get out everywhere. For about 5 months, starting in May, we had 480 people going door to door. We also worked vertically through trusted organisations, such as the market women’s association, the drivers’ union, inter-religious council, and Ebola survivors’ group, all of whom are basically influencers at the level of a shared experience, a shared objective, a shared profession. They were in addition to the people turning up at your door, and in market-places. You need the right kind of messaging - not just talking at people, but talking with people. We held focus groups on Saturdays at community centres, to create further opportunities for conversations. On the social media level, I ran a six week session called “Let wi tok bot Corona” on Facebook Live, 3 times a week on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9.15 till 9.30. That was in the early stages, starting in April or May, the idea being to provide a platform for people to talk at a wider level. Not just in community meetings, but Facebook Live, and we also aired on radio too. Thousands of listeners and viewers tuned in each time, including people in the diaspora. So we tried many different forms of messaging, like videos, TV advertisements, and latterly an animation called Bola and Rona, which are short for Ebola and Corona. They are two cartoon figures who discuss together about what he used to do and what she’s got to watch out for, if she wants to get these people infected. That’s airing on TV now. They’re short, just 2 minutes, to keep giving the core messages of masking up, and avoiding crowds. Do look at the plan on our website if you want more details.

But what about people in slum settlements where you can’t socially distance and you don’t have a water supply? How do they manage?

The reason I was late just now is we are just literally finishing up our two-year report on “Transform Freetown”, which has a COVID section and which goes to print tomorrow. Let me summarise, though you’ll see that everything I am saying is also in there. Behaviour Change support works on what can you do if you don’t have running water and cannot socially distance. We had the “Mask-Up Freetown” campaign through which we gave out 145,000 masks free to the vulnerable, particularly women in markets – market traders, commercial drivers and persons with disabilities. We worked with three local designers on our “Mask-Up” campaign, which also provided much-needed employment for local tailors. Much of this COVID work we did with funding from the EU, and the UK government’s FCDO, but we had other smaller contributions too, from philanthropists, private sector organisations and Freetonians.

For water, we delivered more than 160 rainwater harvesting systems to informal settlements so they could get water, as it was the rainy season by then. Now it’s the dry season, we’re looking at trucking of water supplies, arranging this with the water management committees for each of the settlements. More than 160 rainwater harvesting systems went out, each with 5,000 or 10,000 litre tanks, providing a considerable increase in water provision. We also provided handwashing stations in markets, supported by monitors in 23 of our markets. These people are still stationed there fulltime during trading hours, with a megaphone, to remind people that COVID hasn’t gone away, so mask-up and wash hands. Another area of support is on food. When this all started, the news internationally and what we saw from other countries in the media made us think that the national government might put the city into lockdown. What would the consequence be for people who live hand to mouth and day by day? There were in fact three days of lockdown in April last year. We gave food out in three communities, targeting the elderly. On a more sustainable level, we are now supporting 300 women-headed households in an urban farming pilot project. We’ve given them tools, seeds, and planting boxes, in three informal settlements. I’ve been looking at the photos of the scheme and I should be going out next week to see how they’re getting on. What started as a COVID response we will now carry on with post-COVID. The idea was to see if we could provide some basics – clearly we’re not growing rice - but vegetables, such as peppers, and tomatoes - if there’s a lock-down vulnerable residents have a better chance of coping with it if they are growing

some of their own food. For women who are the family's breadwinner and have several children as dependents this can make a world of difference. We're really excited with this urban farming scheme and want to scale up and continue with this as a sustainability intervention.

Often what happens when there is a health crisis is that people become afraid of hospitals. I saw this with Ebola. In particular, pregnant women don't want to go to the main hospital, but if you're going to have a baby, you're going to have a baby. So we set up to upgrade six Primary Health Units (PHUs) where you can actually deliver babies. Two of these have now kicked-off, thanks to support from the EU, and the World Bank has agreed to fund another three. And then on isolation and quarantine - how do you support and break the chain of transmission when you're in an informal settlement? We raised money for a 180-bed facility for a Community Care Centre, using the army training facility as the site, making some modifications and supplying equipment. The Ministry of Defence provided the staffing and funding came from the EU and FCDO. The rationale is if you have people who are asymptomatic, you don't want them in the community. They can't safely isolate in an informal settlement as the virus will continue to spread. You don't want to take them to the few treatment centres available as they will clog them up. So why not develop a really decent place for people to go for quarantine purposes. We've had low levels of positive tests. Pre-Christmas, we didn't get to the point when we needed to use the CCC, since we were at only about 3 cases a day, so the centre was mothballed. Now after the holidays, and with the new variant, we've seen up to 140 cases a day. There has been a really big jump. At the moment the centre is mothballed while we wait to see what happens. You do afterwards wonder whether you've made the right decision, but things need to move fast at times like this. Perhaps the most important thing we've done for quarantine has been supporting people who are having to isolate in their homes. The government makes a decision that a home must be quarantined, but there's no guarantee people will get food on time. We've stepped in, providing food for 1,700 quarantined persons in 264 homes and this has made a huge difference for those concerned. We've received so many messages and texts. I remember one message that read "thank you so much, that made a big difference, until the City Council delivered supplies, my baby had no baby food". So, in a nutshell, that's what we've been doing.

It's an impressive and comprehensive approach,

which offers many good examples for other cities to follow in Sierra Leone, and other parts of the world. Are you working to spread this experience?

Yes, indeed. I have been working with the C40 Cities, Mayors' Migration Council, Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, the Global Parliament of Mayors and United Cities and Local Government (UCLG). These are the five main platforms for city partnerships that we're involved in. We've shared our experience and our plan is on our website. I was also part of the C40 Cities Mayors' Taskforce for developing plans for a just and green recovery, which builds on sharing experience with what we're doing and how we've managed the pandemic to date.

Let me ask about Transform Freetown. I saw that you have been instituting a property register and starting to get a proper system of ratings which would allow the city an independent source of revenue. How's it getting on?

I have to say, it was in my manifesto to digitise the entire city. We did it! The whole thing! There's an article in the Economist and in African Arguments about this. In short, we used satellite images to identify every roof top in the city, and we measured them, we sent enumerators out, from which we developed an electronic tax system. We have moved from having registered 30,000 to more than 100,000 properties. I can show you if you let me share my screen. This programme has every property in the city captured, which has allowed us to increase the property rates revenue five-fold. But we've faced big challenges with central government. So much so that the Ministry of Local Government put a stop to the implementation of the new system. At present, we are not allowed to collect property rates. But I do expect to start collecting taxes later this year. We've built a great system and we're looking forward to using this. The new system was funded by FCDO. We've had support from the International Centre for Tax and Development, from the International Growth Centre, and multiple local players here.

This then gives you a knowable, established basis for raising municipal revenue?

Yes, certainly it gives you a knowable financial base. But you can't really manage a city if you don't know who's in it and what's in it. We are building a broader data system to which we can add as we go, so everything we do in council is rooted in one common comprehensive software system. We have property rates, and we hope to have building permits devolved to the City Council. It needs to

include assets which we own, so that the administration of the City Council needs to refer and speak to one single system, which is currently not the case.

There have been two lock-downs, of three days each time. We currently have a 10pm to 5am curfew. But this scientist I mentioned earlier wrote a really good article the other day saying some of these measures are totally counter-productive in African cities, where there is a high degree of informality and people spend more time outdoors. Creating a curfew is taking people indoors when they wouldn't normally be indoors. Living accommodation is so tight and unsanitary for many people, which creates a counter-productive situation. Then you get this mad rush before curfew. Public transport is made up of mini-buses which are jam-packed as everybody is trying to get home before the curfew starts. That's the way to create more super-spreaders. I am not convinced that the curfews and lockdowns serve the purpose here which they evidently do in other parts of the world. We need to be more consistent with mask-wearing indoors and more consistent with testing and tracing. As we see to some extent in the UK, and amongst the Trumpists in the US, with the "No mask-wearing brigade", it's all a question of trust and believing the message. Imposing curfews and lockdown has had a positive aspect which is they have restricted movement between districts and increased testing, so if you leave Freetown at the moment you have to be tested first. This increase in testing has shown an increase in cases, which helps us all get a better sense of reality. Previously, we had three cases a day pre-Christmas, and we have to ask ourselves was that really true or was there just not enough testing?

What's the prospect of a vaccination roll-out by Freetown City Council?

These are responsibilities held by national government, so we do not have the mandate to take action on these issues, and I am not aware of central government's plans.

And can you pursue your green recovery options by getting investment into renewable energy? Is this something for city government to take forward?

Sadly not. On energy planning and investment, this also is a central government responsibility. The Local Government Act which dates from 2004 is silent on off-grid energy systems, since we were not then thinking about off-grid solutions. What we can do is to plant trees, and we plan to plant one million trees as we laid out in "Freetown the Treetown". It's really important to us to protect those trees. But in Freetown as a whole, more than 80% of cooking fuel comes from firewood, so we are making alternative fuels for clean cooking our focus.

It's tough enough trying to do the things for which we have a mandate. We've got our hands full! We try to make sure anything we build has solar panels. I can't take on additional things for which the City Council does not have a mandate and where we would really struggle to get things done. But we know that the only way forward is a green way forward. So we must strengthen climate resilience, by planting a million trees. We are also advocating for building permits to be devolved effectively and issued by us, so we can take environmental management into account in development control. This would help a lot in preventing construction in flood prone areas. Since we started the flood mitigation programme, we have not had any serious flooding.

How Africa's Private Sector Has Been Dealing with COVID-19

Mossadeck Bally, Azalai Hotels group: "Africa's Economic Recovery Plans Must Involve the Private Sector as an Integral Part" October 2020.

In this interview, Mr. Mossadeck Bally, a Malian businessman and CEO of [Azalai Hotels Group](#) and member of GRAIN (Group of Reflection, Actions and Innovative Initiatives) discusses the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on his hotel



group, the role of the Malian private sector in the economic recovery plan, youth employment and the solutions that must be provided to the political crisis in Mali.

Where were you at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic – in Bamako?

Yes, I had come back to Bamako on March 16th, after my last trip which was to check on progress with a new hotel site in Dakar. I didn't leave Bamako again until August 10th. I hadn't spent so much uninterrupted time

in Bamako, for more than 30 years, when I started being a businessman.

With multiple businesses in the region, what is your assessment of the actions taken by governments to manage the crisis?

Overall, I have to admit there has been far more talk than action, particularly in the first weeks and months. A series of support plans were announced at the beginning which sounded fairly generous, but in practice they never saw the light of day. From a personal point of view, I felt pretty disappointed by government reactions. Our business is present in six West African countries, and in none of these have we received any help from the state, except for Benin, for which I am very grateful. One small boost we have obtained has come from some of our rooms being rented or requisitioned by government to house citizens returning to the country who needed to quarantine for some days. Apart from that, although we had asked for help in providing partial payment to many of our staff who we had to lay-off, for direct financial help, or for a suspension of tax payments, we received nothing of any kind. That's why I feel disappointed not to have received any of the help one might have expected.

In the case of Mali, has greater support been given perhaps to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)? Perhaps it is thought that your business might be more resilient?

I don't think that anything concrete in terms of help has been given to SMEs or the informal sector. So far as the banking sector is concerned in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) region, the Central Bank of West African States, decided to ask all commercial banks to give a three-month holiday for interest payments on loans owed by businesses, which was renewed a second time, giving them a total of six months. In principle, this will have come to an end at the end of September, despite the pandemic still being present, and economic activity still at a low point. Will the Central Bank ask all banks to extend this interest rate holiday? We don't know yet.

Have governments given more help to the poorest households, such as in the form of food aid?

Yes, so far as social safety nets are concerned, in most countries these needs have been taken into account. In contrast to the business sector where words of support have greatly exceeded practical action, for social issues, most governments have done something: they have distributed food, and made money transfers through Mobile Banking systems.

What lockdown measures were taken in Bamako, was there a curfew?

We didn't have a lockdown in Bamako. At the start, there was a night-time curfew which was more or less adhered

to for a while, but there was nothing like the lockdown imposed in some African countries, and what we saw in Europe and the US. That's for a simple reason, since in Africa it's extremely difficult to impose a lockdown on people who need to seek out income and food on a day to day basis.

We've also seen, according to the figures available, that both case numbers and deaths from COVID-19 in Africa have been fairly low.

Yes, the deathrate seems extremely low in Africa, from what the statistics say. Take the case of Mali which has reported 3,000 cases and 125 deaths from COVID-19. You can see from this that the impact of the pandemic has above all been economic, rather than a health concern. While the impact on health has been kept low, the economic impact has, by contrast, been far more painful in Africa, because people have lost their jobs, cannot find work and have no income. Consequently, the situation is really difficult for many people in all our countries at the moment.

The tourism sector is amongst the worst affected by the Covid-19 crisis. How has it affected your business, the group Azalai in particular? And what kind of measures have you taken to address this crisis?

When the world economy stops, that means there is no more travelling, so travel-related businesses are the first to be impacted. Tourism, hotels, airlines, road transport and everything associated with travel, transport and logistics – they all suffer. Every sector has been suffering from the pandemic, but these that I have just cited have been hit most immediately. Once the pandemic had arrived in our region, in mid-March, we shut the hotels, suspended all staff contracts, and then tried hard to manage all our costs. For example, we suspended lots of contracts for delivery of various services, for staff, for other goods. In this way, we tried to bring down our costs very substantially, because we had zero income, so we had to cut costs. We kept a very small core group of staff for maintenance of hotels and to ensure security, and we have a small team at headquarters. From the end of July, we re-opened the hotels, though business is very timid. But we thought it best to reopen and respond to new orders as they re-emerge. Little by little we hope that activity will re-grow. So, yes, indeed, our industry is really badly hit, and it's a very difficult period for us.

Currently, we have some hotels with 5% occupancy, others at 20%. Above all, we're trying to rely on local custom – such as conferences and seminars – but it's very low key. And on top of the pandemic, in several countries there are major concerns about politics and security, such as in the case of Mali. Today, Mali is subject to an embargo^[1], so the airport is shut to

flights from the ECOWAS region, which handicaps us here since most of our customers are from this region. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, there is now a heightened political risk due to the forthcoming elections and associated tensions. This kind of situation doesn't encourage businesswomen and men to travel there to deal with important matters. For the last ten years, we've had security issues right across the Sahel zone, with added flashpoints here and there, and also we've had the last decade of political troubles in Guinea Bissau. Happily, today, that has come to an end, but now it is Côte d'Ivoire which is worrying us. Add the economic impact of the pandemic and that explains why we have almost no business. We have had to face up to all these difficulties, but we have a certain resilience thanks to the scale of the business and the fact that we've been operating for 26 years. If we make the right decisions during this period of crisis, I hope we will be amongst those still alive and operating when the pandemic has passed.

What should be the role of the private sector in economic recovery strategies? As a business, do you have a representative body working with other businesses in Mali to discuss a common strategy, or are you rather on your own?

We do have a number of professional bodies which represent us, such as the National Business Leaders' Council, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the network of West African Businesses. These organisations represent the private sector and speak to government and ministers on a regular basis. At the start of the pandemic, we offered proposals for how the state might help us during the crisis, of which some were taken up, and others rejected. Once we have left the pandemic crisis behind, and in the case of Mali, once a new government has been installed, we will re-establish this dialogue with government, to see with them how they can support all our businesses, since we have all been badly hit by the pandemic. We aim to have some influence with the decisions government takes, through the work of our business bodies.

How should African governments re-think their development strategies and models coming out of this crisis?

A country like Mali is above all founded on agro-pastoral assets and activities. I would like to see a massive investment in this sector, including agro-industry, because that's where Mali's wealth lies, rather than in mining. While it is true that we're now the third largest exporter of gold in Africa, Mali would do better to grow its economy by making much better use of its farming and livestock activities. For this to happen you need certain things to be in place. The first is energy. Mali needs to call for PPP projects (Public-Private-

Partnerships) to address the big gap between demand and supply of energy. Without energy, we cannot transform our agricultural raw materials, and we'll always stay an exporter of wealth and importer of finished commodities, and hence an importer of inflation and of poverty. To stop this, we need abundant energy which is available at low prices.

The second essential step is to invest massively in human capital. In Mali today schooling has been completely "flooded". In the last three decades, the education system in Mali has been totally destroyed, despite it being one of the best in Africa earlier on, during the 1st and 2nd Republics. Sadly, the 3rd Republic completely sacked the school system, and we need now to reinvest massively in education. When I talk about schooling, I mean primary and secondary. I consider that all citizens should go to school for at least six years, preferably nine, in order to benefit from a really good education which is non-religious and free of fees for these nine years. To my mind, this is the minimum. After nine years we need to direct 90% say to further study in technical and professional training. Current and future jobs in Mali are fairly basic – we need electro-mechanics, project managers, computer scientists, livestock and agricultural technicians. These are the skills Mali needs. Only a small proportion say 5-10% have the intellectual capacity to go for longer academic studies to become administrators and officials. Even for this longer training period, we should be giving preference to STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and less attention to literary subjects and humanities. Mali does not have enough job openings for the latter. This is the second fundamental thing to put in place.

The third is to have a strong state, which is visionary, looking long term, willing to build and able to carry out its essential tasks; that is to say the security of its frontiers, assurance for people to be able to travel about within the country without any fear, and proper distribution of law and justice. The state also needs a strong army to protect its frontiers, ensuring its members are well-trained, and it needs to have a justice system which does not allow for any impunity, with no "let-out" for powerful people. We can't have a situation where the rich win and the poor lose all the time. The private sector can and must invest in education. If all three of these foundation stones are there - a visionary, effective state, an energy supply, and well-trained people, Mali could really make huge progress in less than a generation, becoming a middle-income country, as has been seen in China. It is less than 40 years since they moved from being extremely poor to a more or less developed state today. Just forty years it has taken, having been launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978.

How might young people find a greater sense of hope in current conditions? As a hotel-owner, what actions can you take to offer them work, or contracts for delivery of services?

The question of young people is crucial, perhaps the most crucial on the continent today. Africa needs to generate some 20-30 million jobs annually to keep up with the number of young people entering the jobs' market each year. Let's not forget either that by 2050, the total population of Africa is expected to have doubled. How might we ensure that this demographic growth brings a dividend, such as happened in China? By contrast, if we do nothing it could become a bomb which explodes in our hands. It takes us back to the previous question – we need an effective state, which has a long-term vision, offers justice, is able to construct for the future, and which is not corrupt. We can't be led by corrupt and incompetent people. You can put in place however many programmes to support youth, but if you have leaders who keep all the power in the hands of a tiny group, add to this their corruption and incompetence, and none of the benefits will reach youth. Everything begins with good governance.

Young people above all are entrepreneurial at heart. They really want to get themselves moving, and they understand perfectly well that the state will never be able to create enough employment for them, so they have to take their future in their own hands. I am always hugely impressed when I meet young people, as regards their dynamism, their desire to get things done and to make something of themselves, but they rarely receive any help. The largest hurdle they face is access to funds. If we want their business activities to lead somewhere, they need some form of financial mechanism. In the US for example, the Small Business Administration offers seed capital to young entrepreneurs, to get them going. They may only need EUR2,000 – it's not a lot to get started, but they cannot find this small sum partly because the banks won't consider lending such small amounts.

I belong to a business leaders' organisation called the West African Business Network. We are putting in place a Business Angels programme (in this case the Mali Business Angels) with the aim of providing youth with the coaching, mentoring, training and management expertise that will help them at the start. Of the ten young people we help, they won't all be successful business-owners but if 2 to 4 of them succeed, each one may generate 10, 15 or 20 jobs, so that has a snow-ball effect. Sadly, there are many countries where such a programme does not exist, which can only discourage our youth. That is one of the reasons why many prefer to take their chances with migration, as they cannot see a future for themselves at home. Whenever such

programmes get put in place, we must make sure that they're involved in designing how the programme works, as it's them above all who will be the users or consumers of the programme. Too often we don't listen to what they think or say, but we just go ahead and design a programme without considering how it might meet their needs. I would prefer that this kind of programme be lodged in a non-state body, as government structures are often too bureaucratic and subject to funds being diverted for other purposes. Rather, let's set up ad-hoc structures which can be staffed by young business leaders, managed in a private sector fashion, with an open call for recruitment by the managing agency.

Let's move onto the current political situation in Mali: there is now a transitional President, and a process of reflection is underway involving Malian women and men to consider amendments to the constitution. Tell us where you are with this process.

Yes, indeed, a group of Malian citizens from different backgrounds and professions has decided to step forward, and not hang back anymore. Up till now, many of us had been pursuing our careers without saying too much. But now we have started meeting on a regular basis each Saturday to discuss the many problems we all face. We are asking ourselves what is the future we want to see and how do we re-build the institutional architecture of our country to enable the 4th Republic to emerge? At present, an 18-month transitional period has been proposed and agreed by ECOWAS. Over the course of these 18 months, I don't think we'll be able to achieve a lot, but we hope at least to revise the Constitution, the Electoral Code, and the Charter regulating the activities of political parties. We have for example more than 200 political parties in Mali – it's simply not possible! And we must also prepare for elections, and that means getting agreement from political parties, and civil society, to put in place a timetable.

What might be essential elements in a new Constitution? Is the devolution of powers a necessary part?

I think that any Malian who looks back over the last 60 years since Independence, during which we've had four coups d'état, and three rebellions in the north of the country, knows that these are the result of a lack of effective government, a non-governance regime, and a hyper-concentration of power in the hands of very few, based in Bamako. One of the paths we must travel is to see how we can really shift power away from the capital and move towards local government which will be elected by local people and be accountable to them. If you're in Bamako, how can you be accountable to someone in Gao which is 1200km away, or Kayes which is a distance of 600km? It is impossible and an

illusion to think you can manage development in Nara when you're sitting in Bamako. There are lots of options for decentralised government: from a very grassroots system, a regional approach, or a form of federal government, as you find in Nigeria, the US, Australia and Germany, in fact in many parts of the world. We need to bring centres of decision-making close to the people, in order to ensure that the interests and priorities of ordinary people are taken into account.

[1] Lifted on October 6th following the installation of a civilian-led government.

Carl Manlan, Ecobank Foundation: "African Philanthropy Has Mobilized Effectively During COVID19" December 2020.

In this interview, Folashadé Soulé and Camilla Toulmin speak with Carl Manlan, the Chief Operating Officer of the Ecobank Foundation - responsible for Ecobank's social impact engagement with the communities in which the bank operates in Africa - on the role of African philanthropy and corporate social responsibility in the response to COVID-19 on the continent.



Carl Manlan works at the intersection of public, private and civil society sectors. Through his professional career he contributed to health financing through multi-lateral organisations. As a Mo Ibrahim Fellow at the Economic Commission for Africa, he focused on industrial and agricultural policies designed to accelerate the transformation of the African continent. Prior to his current role at Ecobank Foundation, he led a public-private initiative to support an African response to Ebola in West Africa.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered in Africa, just as in many parts of the world, both a health and an economic crisis. Although the continent seems - for now - less affected than others by infection and high death rates, the economic impact has been much harder. Growth in sub-Saharan Africa has already been significantly affected, in part due to lockdown measures, but also to a significant drop in global demand for Africa's exports. From your standpoint, how do you assess the economic and social impact the pandemic is having on African economies and livelihoods?

The social impact was always going to be profound, and to have assumed otherwise was to ignore the obvious. When you have a continent with the large number of individuals that work in the informal sector or the

popular economy, as you do in Africa, you realize that government measures to safeguard health are felt differently here. When an informal trader misses an opportunity to sell her wares because lockdown measures mean there is no traffic on the road that day, she cannot guarantee that there will be food on the table, or that her children will be able to continue going to school. She has no safety net. The challenge is persistently social.

The question the pandemic has highlighted is one that we have always known: what happens when the informal or the popular economy can no longer operate on a daily basis? We can only ignore this question if we are fighting diseases and viruses that do not restrict movement, that do not restrict the informal trader's ability to interact with her customers.

When we had the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, we started to see the impact of a virus that travelled. Ebola moved from rural areas - where it has always been - to urban areas, before getting on a plane and going overseas without a visa. We saw what the global reaction was at the time. A coalition of 50 countries pledged billions of dollars. Now, with COVID-19 we see a virus with a different character, one which primarily affects individuals that are connected to the world through travel, and spend a lot of their time in different countries. When this group of people in our societies were hit by COVID-19, the response was completely different from that during the Ebola outbreak and we continue to see the differences.

The race to tackle the virus is an economic issue, and a social issue. Of course, the two are connected and that's the beauty - if I can phrase it that way - of the current situation. COVID-19 has forced us to confront our realities: that you cannot have a conversation about double-digit economic growth without addressing how the livelihoods of individuals and communities will improve. Economic growth and improvement in livelihoods should be in sync. If the objective is to improve somebody's livelihood through trade, agriculture, manufacturing, or industrialization, we cannot assume that the social aspect will resolve itself.

Let's take much simpler diseases that affect African communities. I like to use examples of neglected tropical diseases, because they remind us that even when science has given us the tools to beat many complex medical problems, we still struggle to end them for good. Take schistosomiasis, for example, transmitted by parasitic flatworms. It limits children's ability to go to school. On a continent with a majority youth population, the leaders of tomorrow, can we afford to have children miss out on an education because of a preventable disease? With neglected tropical diseases, we have left the social elements to be

resolved by others.

What COVID-19 has shown us is that we can no longer ignore the social elements because they are embedded in the economic growth narrative. Without taking the social elements into consideration, whatever economic growth we have will not be sustainable. And unfortunately, for us, this is what COVID-19 has reinforced. It's a message that we must all heed.

The impact of Covid-19 in Africa so far has been severe: millions of Africans who were economically vulnerable before the crisis have lost their jobs and livelihoods. Several African companies and their foundations, like the Ecobank Foundation, have also stepped up during this crisis, not always in a very public manner, but there have been various initiatives. How do you analyze the way African companies have carried out their corporate social responsibilities during the crisis? And what has been the specific role of the Ecobank Foundation since the beginning of the crisis?

My favourite SDG is Goal 17 because without partnerships, we cannot accomplish the other goals. Ebola had already shown us that it is impossible to tackle big challenges without partnerships. Big challenges are surmounted through collaboration and coordination between civil society, private sector, and government. The response to COVID-19 in Africa has been instrumental in showing us how coordination can be done at the country, regional, and, critically, at the African Union level. We demonstrated that we had learned the lessons of the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak, when we didn't have an Africa CDC - Centre for Diseases Control. Now we do.

The fact that you had political alignment on how to deal with Covid-19 helped private sector organizations construct a clear narrative as to how resources should be used. Almost every country set up a solidarity fund to which individuals, private sector companies and organizations were asked to contribute - and people did. For me, that demonstrates a certain element of trust in society - to believe that we are in this together and whatever you have, you should pool your resources, so we can do more.

At Ecobank Foundation, the response was primarily a direct response to the situation in each of the countries where Ecobank is present. So Ecobank Togo, Ecobank Rwanda, Ecobank Guinea-Bissau etc. looked at what their host government needed and what measures had been put in place, and we contributed accordingly. So that's where the support went, because governments were very clear about what they needed. If there's one key lesson, it is the combined ability of governments to identify priorities, for example from a health perspective, and for others to join in those efforts.

COVID-19 is peculiar because of its social impact. It is an urban phenomenon. And I think that is one of the lessons to be learned for how we deal with viruses or diseases on our continent. When a disease is urban-focused, it affects a group in society that in general has better access to resources. Their reaction to it is also faster because they can immediately see its impact on their livelihoods and on their businesses.

If we look at diseases that predominantly affect rural areas, we do not see the same swift response. So, a fundamental question for me is, how do we learn from this experience? How can we use what we have learnt to resolve some of the health issues that still hamper our economic transformation? Now we have a blueprint to respond to these kinds of emergencies, how do we strengthen further the Africa CDC, and other Pan-African institutions so that they can respond better in future?

In terms of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda, it has become clear that you can no longer separate CSR from core business. Because for CSR to exist, you need to be making money; if you're not making money, your CSR funding inevitably will be less. The way we do business on the continent needs to embed the social elements that guarantee a common future for all citizens. Even though some of us were able to quarantine in safe environments, the majority of people was not able to do so. How do we safeguard the lives and livelihoods of millions of Africans who inhabit informal settlements? In these environments, it is impossible to comply with guidelines for physical distancing and handwashing. In its current conception, CSR cannot resolve these challenges. The conversation needs to shift to the type and quality of CSR needed for the continent, and what kind of philanthropy we need for this continent. These questions are familiar to us, but COVID-19 has made them starker. CSR is tied to profit, so if a company is not making any profit, the CSR conversation is a very limited one. We have to find other sources of funding for social projects - for example, can we turn to the diaspora? Can we turn to Africans with greater disposable income? COVID-19 forces us to look inward - if all countries are suffering, at different scales, can we expect richer countries to set aside resources to continue funding development aid?

African philanthropists have stepped up their support for the people and communities most impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic throughout the continent, but their actions have mostly remained very local and not beyond their country of origin. How do you assess the role of African philanthropy in responding to COVID-19?

The first response, if you think about where the businesses of these philanthropists are located, is to safeguard the livelihoods and the lives of individuals in

the country where they operate and most of their assets are secured. But this is only the visible tip of the iceberg. In each country, you have wealthy individuals and many of them have responded without necessarily being on the front page of a newspaper. If we don't see it, does it mean that it doesn't happen?

When Jack Ma, via the Alibaba Foundation, decides to donate PPE equipment to all African countries, we need to see that in the context of China having become the industrial hub of the world. Therefore, distributing PPE and masks, is simply buying and shipping a product that is produced on his doorstep. But the company that shipped most of the Alibaba Foundation's goods was an African company, Ethiopian Airlines. We hope that Africa, through the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, becomes an industrial hub and can then produce these goods themselves.

In Africa, the private sector has mobilized in at least Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. Initiatives have included support to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) at the local level, but also at the continental level, in recognition of the fact that MSMEs are actually the bread and butter of our continent. If we want to escape the economic trap of viruses and diseases, we need to make sure that we strengthen our MSMEs.

Regarding the future of philanthropy in Africa, a report by the African Philanthropy forum proposes a shift to "dynamic localism" —more specifically, five systemic shifts in how philanthropy as a whole will need to evolve over the next year and beyond in Africa. These include: a shift in the locus of power – from institutions to beneficiaries; Moving towards digital-first planning and programming; Embedding resilience throughout; Strategic flexibility as a core capability; and an end to 'transactional' partners. What is your opinion about this proposal?

First, these factors have always been present. When Ebola hit DRC, an outbreak which only recently ended, it was a neighbour, a local shopkeeper, a farmer who were the first responders. And because we don't put a monetary value on this support, we don't call it philanthropy. But the local aspects of who we are as a community and how we care for each other are themselves a very solid foundation. You are unlikely to go out to care for somebody that you do not feel connected to. The humanity that we demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic did not just appear out of nowhere, it has always existed in our communities. The African Philanthropy Forum report states the obvious by saying that we have to start thinking about existing networks and mechanisms that support our communities. We may not be able to put a monetary value on existing networks, but we are reminded by a crisis like this that there exist networks that can leverage diverse resources. You need to take the time to

understand how existing networks operate.

The second element for me has to do with individual contributions to a larger pool. What should be the purpose of philanthropy on a continent where the majority of young people still lack access to better education and health? Do we look at these needs through a philanthropic lens or through a sustainability lens? Perhaps we can do both, but it is critical that we approach these challenges in a way that ensures we deliver the sustainable development goals.

The third element for me takes us back to partnerships. Do partnerships only exist when big entities, big philanthropists, are coordinating the efforts? Or can partnerships exist in other ways? Take for example, when a group of five or ten women in the rural area, somewhere in Africa put aside \$1 or \$2 and use this as seed money to invest in a small business. These small partnerships should also attract our attention because, while it is nice to see big numbers being announced, it is the small numbers that permeate throughout our communities. What we are able to do in our local communities, the number of people that we are able to help by sending money using digital platforms, the efforts to support a relative we have not seen in decades, and so forth, that is where impact resides.

Crises can provide a window of opportunity, a moment of enhanced possibility, when it is easier to achieve large-scale change. Despite all the suffering caused by the coronavirus, could it also be an opportunity for reform? Will economic globalization be different after coronavirus? And if it will be different, how?

Surely the model of having a strong domestic market is critical, but to achieve that strong domestic market, you need to have people that are engaged in economic activity. You need to be creating jobs. We must think hard about achieving greener, more sustainable industrialization. Success will depend on our ability to deliver green and renewable energy. Otherwise, we may not be around to enjoy the benefits of the changes we are arguing for, and we will be destined to leave our children with a poisoned legacy. This is the first time, in a long time, when we have been forced to pause. We have suddenly seen the whole world pressing the pause button by the force of a virus. We find ourselves asking questions like: Do I really need all these possessions, or can I share them with someone who needs them more than I do, someone who will make better use of them? The answer takes you back to the community, that is where the future lies. The future is in the ability of communities to find the resources within themselves to offer a better future for everyone.



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