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BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

HOW AFRICA CAN EMERGE STRONGER AFTER COVID-19

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## PROCEEDINGS

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews.

Every year from 2011 to the present, the Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings has published Foresight Africa, a report that looks at the top priorities and challenges for the continent in the coming year. The theme of the 2021 report, and of this episode, is that while addressing the Coronavirus and its consequences as a top priority for Africa, it is equally important that the pandemic not be allowed to destroy gains and growth, livelihoods and unity the region has experienced in recent years.

To talk about these issues and the Foresight Africa Report, I'm joined in the zoom podcast studio by Aloysius Uche Ordu, Director of the Africa Growth Initiative and a Senior Fellow in the Global Economy and Development Program at Brookings. You can also hear Aloysius Ordu on the most recent episode of the Dollar and Sense podcast with David Dollar, on whether COVID-19 could be a great reset for African economies.

Also on this episode, Senior Fellow Molly Reynolds explains how the budget reconciliation process in Congress works, especially the Senate parliamentarians critical role, and why democrats may use it to pass President Biden's COVID-19 relief measures, with a simple majority vote in the House and Senate, thus avoiding a Senate filibuster.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter @PolicyPodcasts to get information about and links to all our shows including Dollar and Sense: The Brookings Trade Podcast, the Current, and our Events Podcast. First up, here's Molly Reynolds with what's happening in Congress.

REYNOLDS: This is Molly Reynolds, a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies at the

Brookings Institution. Democrats are just a few weeks into unified party control of Washington, and have already begun work on their first major legislative priority, and additional rounds COVID-19 relief legislation.

While President Biden held a meeting with a group of Senate Republicans to discuss a possible bipartisan proposal, Democrats are taking important procedural steps that will allow them to move the legislative package to the Senate without the possibility of filibuster.

The process is known as a budget reconciliation, and it begins with the House and Senate agreeing on a blueprint known as the Budget Resolution. That Budget Resolution contains what are known as reconciliation instructions, which direct specific committees in the House and Senate to write legislative proposals that make changes to either mandatory spending programs like Medicare, Medicaid, Price Supports, student loans and nutritional systems, or federal revenues in their jurisdictions.

Once the committees have completed this process, their submissions are packaged together into a single piece of legislation that comes to the floor for a vote in the House and Senate. Importantly, in the Senate, this bill can't be filibustered. Meaning that instead of having to get 60 votes to end debate, the majority party can complete action on it without needing to attract votes from the other party.

What do we know about plans for this package? The budget resolution proposed in the House and Senate sets important parameters for what it will look like both in terms of size and content. The instructions included in the measure would allow for supplement reconciliation bill that increases the federal deficit by up to \$1.9 trillion over the next 10 years. With that overall pie divided up across 12 committees in the House and 11 in the Senate.

Because of the limitations placed by what kinds of spending can be handled through the

reconciliation process, some committees have much larger instructions than others. The House Ways and Means Committee, for example, is responsible for roughly 40 percent of the total change in the House, and the Senate Finance Committee is responsible for almost 70 percent of the total change in the Senate.

Both of these panels have jurisdiction over both revenue measures, a large share of health care spending, and unemployment insurance.

Even though committee jurisdictions mean that a few committees will be responsible for most of the budgetary change in a forthcoming reconciliation bill, the fact that a large number of House and Senate committees will be involved in the reconciliation process is important. It marks a return to an older model of how Congress used the reconciliation process.

That is, to get lots of committees working on policy changes, package those policy changes together and then bring them to the floor for a single vote. Recent uses of the reconciliation process shows the passage of parts of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, unsuccessful attempts to repeal that law in 2015 and 2017, and the Republican tax cuts in 2017 have been much more targeted at specific policy areas, ones that are central to that party's agenda.

In response to both the breadth of the challenges facing the country, and to the expected difficulty of legislating across party lines, Democrats are taking a much broader approach this year.

What will shape the package going forward? On one hand are the rules of the reconciliation process. Especially something known as the Byrd Rule, which are complicated, but limit what can be done using the procedures in important ways. Among these limits are a requirement that a provision included under a reconciliation bill must make changes to federal

outlays or revenues. And those changes can't be merely incidental to any nonbudgetary aspects of the provision.

The Senate's parliamentarian is central to determining what is and is not merely incidental under this section. And her advice to the Senate on these matters can depend a lot on how the part of the bill in question is drafted.

For example, when Republicans were attempting to use the reconciliation process to repeal the Affordable Care Act, the parliamentarian advised that repealing the requirement that individuals purchase health insurance was not permitted as part of the reconciliation process, but that changing the penalty for not having health insurance to \$0 was allowed.

There are also restrictions on what a reconciliation bill can do to the federal deficit, which has in the past led to oddly structured measures like the Bush tax cuts in the early 2000's, which had to expire after 10 years in order to comply with the rules of the process.

On the other hand, meanwhile, at the policy preferences of elected Democrats in Congress, the reconciliation rules are powerful, but they are not magic. Legislating on a simple majority threshold does not necessarily force members to agree on policy questions on which there is not already consensus. And with a narrow majority in the House and the narrowest of majorities in the Senate, Democrats have very little room for error in constructing a package on which they agree.

Take, for example, the issue of raising the minimum wage. There's active debate as to whether enacting an increase to the federal minimum wage could be done through the reconciliation process and different ways that change could be structured to make it comply with the reconciliation rules. But this assumes a majority in the House and all 50 Democratic Senators support the policy, an assumption that may or may not prove accurate.

The development of the reconciliation package we've filled with questions like this, what's member support, and how does that interact with what the rules allow. For the next several weeks at least, that's what will be happening in Congress.

DEWS: And now my interview with Aloysius Uche Ordu on Foresight Africa 2021 from the Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings. Aloysius, I want to welcome you to the Brookings cafeteria.

ORDU: Fred, thank you very much. Thanks for a warm welcome.

DEWS: So, this is your first appearance on the Brookings Cafeteria, largely because you're relatively new at the Brookings Institution, as Director of the Africa Growth Initiative. So, I'd like to start by having you introduce yourself to the Brookings Cafeteria podcast listeners and where did you come from prior to Brookings, what your goals are as the new Director of Africa Growth Initiative, and so on.

ORDU: Fred, thank you. Thank you very much again and this is greatly appreciated. Where I come from, well I moved from a very little village in the river state of Nigeria and ended up with a long career in international development.

My first stop was the UK, where I studied and worked at both the Economist Intelligence Unit in the Miland Bank. I subsequently joined the World Bank, designing investment projects in diverse sectors in many world regions. Managerial and leadership positions followed as Director at the World Bank. I also worked at the African Development Bank as Vice President Operations.

You asked about my goals. Well, my goals as a new kid on the block here in Brookings, my first priority was, of course, to commence learning the scholarly ropes and working collaboratively with Brookings colleagues. So, that was very, very important to me. Our funders,

scholars, partners, reaching out to African leaders, policymakers, captains of industry, civil society organizations, and a host of others to deliver the Foresight Africa 2021, in a very timely manner.

With COVID, and as you know, working remotely without ever, ever meeting my colleagues in person, I'm absolutely delighted, I'm very grateful to each and every one of them that we pull it off. And particularly, I'm grateful to Christina and I'm grateful to Cole for their guidance and everything that happened.

So, as you know, since its founding, AGI has focused on basically raising African voices in partnership with think tanks and scholars across the continent and in convenient policymakers and leaders from private sector and civil society. These will remain my core priorities as Director of AGI.

Secondly, AGI's strategy focuses on three pillars development financing, Africa working together and in partnership with the world and the digital economy. This strategy also has three cross cutting themes, climate change, technology and governance. My research interests in a couple of these areas of focus in AGI strategy. Thanks for your question.

DEWS: Sure. And just for listeners' knowledge, a minute ago you referenced Christina Golubski, who works with the AGI --

ORDU: Yes.

DEWS: Africa Growth Initiative, and Cole is Brahim Coulibaly, your predecessor and now the Vice President and Director of Global Economy and Development at Brookings.

ORDU: Absolutely, correct.

DEWS: And I interviewed him a year ago when he was the Director of AGI on the Foresight Africa report, which I believe then was in its 10th edition.

ORDU: Right.

DEWS: So, this is an annual report put out by the Africa Growth Initiative. And also this is the third, fourth or fifth time I've had the pleasure of interviewing the AGI director on this podcast near or at the start of the year, because that's when this report comes out.

So, it's a great pleasure to be able to interview you Aloysius, and then to dive into the report, which we're about to do. I'd like to start off with asking you about the overriding theme of the 2021 Foresight Africa Report, which is centered on the impacts of the Coronavirus on Africa.

ORDU: Right.

DEWS: Can you expand on that theme as it relates to the report?

ORDU: Indeed Fred, 2020 will go down in the history of mankind, right, as the worst Recession since the Great Depression. Prior to the virus, as you know Fred, Africa, the African continent accounted for many, many, many of the fastest growing emerging market economies. This was happening at a time when the IMF warned of a synchronized slowdown of the global economy.

Think of Cote d'Ivoire, think of Ethiopia, think of Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, all with sustained GDP above 5 percent, some of them six, seven, 8 percent. Okay, with remarkable progress being made in poverty reduction.

Well, COVID-19 abruptly stalled that momentum. The lockdown meant that those who produce basic goods and other essentials could no longer do so. Consumers had a tough time to access consumables. And with the dominance of the informal sector in Africa, as you know Fred, COVID-19 proved consequential indeed.

You're right, that Africa seems so far to have been spared the worst of the virus. Yet, no one knows when we will recover from this virus. Know what the next pandemic threat might be



all might look like, know where it will come from.

One thing though is for certain, right, is that the next pandemic is not a matter of if, but when. And so a key message we convey in the report is that now is the time to act. The virus is a wakeup call, a timely reminder that we should do things absolutely differently and above all else do things in solidarity.

COVID-19 is a vivid illustration of how climate change and infectious diseases can conspire to sneak up on humanity unless we mend our ways. So, acting collaboratively is the way to go.

DEWS: That's a message that you talk about in your introduction to the report. I'll just remind listeners that they can find it on the Brookings website, Brookings.edu. I want to spend just a couple of more minutes, Aloysius, on the report as kind of a product that the Brookings Institution publishes, before we dive into the specifics. Because this year, and like every year before it, it's a beautiful product, it's an important product, for sure. And it's, you know, that's its main purpose is to inform the policy debate.

But I just want to draw listeners' attention to the quality of the product that they will encounter. And I'd like to start with just the cover image. It's a striking cover image, and you talk about it in your introduction. So, why do you call out the cover image?

ORDU: Thank you very, very much for your compliments. I think the cover was, I'm glad you appreciate it, and I hope that our viewers will do so. Essentially, we call it the image embodies the narrative that our readers will see within the report. Right. Perhaps not a lot of people know that that Africans have been working together in solidarity like never before.

And so you think of the January 1 launching of the African Continental Free Trade Area, right, comprising 55 countries. Second, consider the expeditious establishment of the Africa

CDC, soon after the Ebola crisis, you know, designed basically to, when African said never again, right, and so they set up the CDC.

And so what these things tell us is that Africans have found a new solidarity, a new way of working together. And these things are happening at a time when globalization is under threat, under a severe threat indeed, and many world regions experiencing political tensions and fracture.

We therefore choose to highlight Africa's evident solidarity as something that the rest of the world can learn from in the new dispensation. We recognize, while recognizing that the havoc that COVID-19 is wreaking on the world, we see Africa's shared response as a source of light, if you like, illuminating the continent at dawn. Okay, with the sun's rays of hope, unburdening the African continent from the virus' gripped, ushering in a new beginning. If you like, a new dispensation, a new renaissance of sorts. That's what was behind the image in the cover.

DEWS: Yeah, it's a beautiful cover. And another interesting feature of the report that I want to ask you about, before we dive into the specifics, is the inclusion of a quote from an eminent woman that leads off each chapter. What's the significance of that choice?

ORDU: Yeah, your observation about this feature is right, and it very much reminds me of the powerful image of Amanda Gorman, the poet laureate at President Biden's recent inauguration. Right.

DEWS: Yeah, that was amazing.

ORDU: That was absolutely amazing. And so here in this report, we're also intentional. We were intentional to lead off each chapter with a quotable quote, as you said, by an eminent woman. We often take it for granted that African women are missing from the highest levels of

decision making globally, right. Showcasing top notch women in leadership, we believe sends a very powerful message.

Those shown in this particular 21st edition of Foresight are exceptional role models, serving humanity in positions of trust and responsibility. They continue to inspire all of us.

Imagine what this image means for young girls the world over, and particularly young women and young girls in Africa. Remember, women and girls are central to our ability to build back better. They are central to the achievement of the SDGs and they are central to our obtaining a just world.

Yet, women have borne the brunt of the virus in a number of ways, exacerbating preexisting conditions, in terms of gender inequities in education, in domestic chores, in healthcare work, and in job opportunities.

So, the eminent women that open each chapter basically symbolize what young girls in Africa and the world over can aspire to be. That the sky is the limit to what girls can achieve. And what exactly are these young women and girls all over the world and in Africa asking for, all they seek is equal opportunities and they will excel.

DEWS: Well, those quotes are just part of the rich tapestry that comprises the Foresight Africa Report that I look forward to seeing every year. And so that combined with the leading essays in each section, and there's extra commentaries and tons of data, it's a deeply researched and rich document that I hope listeners will go check out. So, let's dive into it, Aloysius.

ORDU: Yeah.

DEWS: Some of the things in the report starting again, and you referenced this earlier, what has been the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the continent? I mean, my understanding is that there have been only about, only about 40,000 deaths to COVID-19, which

is a tenth the amount in the United States. So, what has been the overall impact and how have African governments responded to the Coronavirus?

ORDU: So, thank you, thank you very much. That's a very caring question, Fred. The pandemic indeed had serious impacts on the African continent in a couple of indicators, tourism plummeted due to travel restrictions. Remittances, money sent by migrants to their folks back home in Africa, significantly dropped, as many in the diaspora and lost their jobs on account of the lockdowns.

The pandemic compounded already high levels of debt of many African countries, pushing them further into higher risks of debt distress. Their ability to mobilize domestic revenues through taxation were constrained as economies hunker down on account of the virus.

The second part of your question is how African governments have responded. There are two ways to look at this response. They responded at the continental level and they responded also at a national level.

At the Continental level, the response was exemplified by solidarity and collaboration. First, a giant African continental strategy on COVID was expeditiously prepared by mid-February, just after the first case was recorded in Egypt, on the African continent. So, that was very fast move. Second, the partnership to accelerate COVID-19 testing was launched immediately after. Testing capacity was ramped up within months, and thousands of laboratory workers were trained across the African continent.

Make no mistake, the Africa CDC came of age and was at the very epicenter of this continental response. With African leadership, the Africa CDC is contributing to a growing human and institutional capacity on Africa's public health security. Gone are the days when Ebola samples had to be airfreighted to Europe and to the U.S. for diagnostics.

At the national level, African governments locked down promptly and spend between 1 percent to 7 percent of their GDP on stimulus packages. They sought and received financing from multilateral and regional development institutions. And 31 of the eligible of the eight African countries participated in the Debt Service Standstill Initiative, which was launched by the G-20 to suspend sovereign debt repayments through end 2020.

So, African countries acted promptly, and more importantly, at a time when the world was really, really globalization was on that trend, and the world was not as collaborative. African countries were collaboratively working together. That's why we see the sort of numbers you're seeing here.

DEWS: And that's really striking. And now this is my own observation. But it's quite a contrast with the decentralized response that we've seen in the United States with --

ORDU: Right.

DEWS: -- the federal government in 2020 and the state governments all having kind of different approaches to it. And again, I don't want to say only 40,000 deaths, but that is a remarkable testament to the power of collaboration and coordination. And yet, you also talked about the continued issues in African economies that have resulted from dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic.

ORDU: Right.

DEWS: And one of them that you brought up earlier is related to the SDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals. So, I wanted to ask you about the Sustainable Development Goal that has to do with eradicating poverty, in particular. I know COVID-19 responses had impacts on health, education and other areas across the continent of Africa. But can you talk about, in particular, what its impact is in the area of poverty and reducing poverty, the

Sustainable Development Goal?

ORDU: Yeah, thank you, thank you very, very much. This is very important. In fact, as you notice in the report, Her Excellency, Amina Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, is one of our contributors for which we thank her very, very much for the piece, brilliant piece she submitted.

But back to your question, before the pandemic, as you know, you know Africa was making remarkably good progress in many, many indicators of well-being. Infant mortality was down, the incidence of HIV AIDS more than half on the African continent. Significant improvements were made in educational enrollment. Access to electric power, financial inclusion, and poverty head counts, an indicator you particularly mentioned. These were all trending downwards, poverty (phonetic).

Indeed, the pandemic rapidly evolved, just like here in the United States, from a health crisis to an all-encompassing economic crisis, with devastating impacts in many areas. The initial shock of the lockdowns impacted people around the world in similar ways, as they did in Africa. Movements in residential places spiked as many people hunkered down in their homes. Movements in places of work in transit, in marketplaces, remember, markets, open markets are fundamental to the livelihoods of Africans. These places were closed and so movement dropped dramatically.

So, while attention to COVID-19 is warranted, we mustn't forget that increased mortality rate, due to cutbacks in basic medical care and other intention, other interventions, we mustn't also forget that resistance, and this is important, resistance to antibiotics remains a silent killer in Africa. This is still ravaging. And obviously, attention to COVID is important, but these are areas that many Africans are still suffering from.

So, the challenge of eliminating extreme poverty by 2030, the SDGs is more difficult now in my view than ever, due to this particular virus. The pandemic further exacerbated economic hardships as you know. And may have pushed, it is estimated, about 46 million Africans into extreme poverty.

So, COVID-19 as you see Fred, has revealed our common humanity with such devastating economic impacts, universal vaccination is absolutely vital. In our interconnected world of today, a disease threat anywhere is a threat everywhere.

So, Africa's health systems may be weak, and a number of people, naysayers, projected that millions of Africans will die. But remember, that over the years Africans have been very, very successful with vaccination campaigns for various diseases. You may recall that recently, Nigeria eradicated wild polio and the Congo DRC successfully stopped Ebola outbreaks with vaccines.

So, these experiences are reasons to be hopeful that Africa will overcome this particular pandemic. Luckily, timely vaccines are now being rolled out. Some of these vaccines are reasonably priced to enable accessibility in low income countries, including those in Africa. What we now urgently need is, in my view, global commitment and collaboration to ensure access to vaccines for all.

DEWS: Well, let's move on Aloysius to the economy. You just talked about the economic impact of Coronavirus across the continent of Africa is severe and demands a lot of attention. So, the authors of the chapter in Foresight Africa, on how Africa's policymakers can bolster their economies now, and then beyond the Coronavirus pandemic, have a lot of great policy ideas that I'd like to hear your thoughts on.

And one in particular, that really struck me was the opportunity they talk about for digital

transformation. So, can you talk about what the economic issues are for recovery, but with particular focus maybe on the digital aspect of it?

ORDU: Thank you. Thank you, Fred. That's a very pertinent question. Because the extent to which African countries technologically lag behind the rest of the world is obviously not new, not news, right, it's well known. COVID on the line, the importance of infrastructure, electric power and broadband for Internet access.

Many African kids have already lost a year of schooling just like here. But the difference, while we take remote learning and e-learning for granted here in the U.S., in Europe and elsewhere in the world, in Asia, these tools remain absolutely, absolutely beyond reach of many kids in rural and urban Africa. And this is important. The World Bank once warned of a learning crisis in global education. The current crisis has now been further compounded by COVID-19.

On the positive side, the pandemic ushered in accelerated adoption of technologies. Lockdown conditions, for example, pushed many sectors to raise their online presence and expand their digital services. Opportunities abound in many sectors, education, retail, retail and finance, right.

So, by lowering transaction costs, for example in digital payments, Kenya and Rwanda in East Africa, have shown the way for other African countries to emulate, to boost adoption of such technologies. Imagine opportunities in digitization and data analytics also exists, and this can help to improve revenue collection, tax receipts on the African continent.

Of the many challenges facing African policymakers, I believe that attention to domestic revenue mobilization is paramount. This raises a number of questions, Fred, how can countries fill the void created by declining remittances, lower foreign direct investments and influence and declining ODM? How can countries strengthen their health systems, the weaknesses of which



were laid bare by this particular virus? How can countries meet the 2001 Abuja Declaration target to allocate 15 percent of their annual budget to the health sector? That was in 2001. How can countries increase spending on science, on technology, on innovation, on ICT broadband infrastructure for enhanced digital transformation?

These are by no means exhaustive of the many challenges confronting African policymakers. The time to act is now to generate internal revenues through tax systems modernization and enhanced efforts to plug the leakages, the leakages in terms of corruption in tax collection across the continent.

DEWS: Well, I want to move on now to another theme. And that has to do with collaboration. I've heard use the term collaboration a couple of times in this conversation. Just underlying how critically important that is. And the theme relates to a chapter, which is authored by the Secretary General of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

ORDU: Right.

DEWS: The Secretariat. And you just mentioned that that Free Trade Area came online, I believe, this last month in January.

ORDU: Yeah.

DEWS: And the thing I like to highlight because it speaks to a question that I think is very interesting. I remember asking this to Brahim Coulibaly before, a conversation we had a couple of years ago. And that's Africa, and I'm going to put that in quotes, "Africa", is a continent of over 50 countries, thousands of languages spoken, and over a billion people, I think its 1.3 billion people inhabit Africa.

So, it's much larger in all ways that we can think of than say the European Union, free trade zone that we talk about a lot. So, in that light, in that context, what are the challenges and

the opportunities of free trade on the continent? And how does that then help to alleviate some of these other key issues that you've just talked about?

ORUD: Sure, thank you. Thank you. You're absolutely right, Fred. The African continent includes 55 countries, from the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea all the way to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. It has, as you said, a population of 1.2, 1.3 billion people, compared to Europe's 741, and of course, the U.S. is 300 plus million, right.

The continent has an aspiration. And Africa's aspirations are well articulated in the African Unions Agenda 63, 2063. That agenda is called The Africa We Want. All right. These aspirations are seven. They include, a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and integrated continent, good governance and democracy, peaceful and secure continent, strong cultural identity and shared values, people driven development. And the seventh, an Africa that is strong, united and globally influential. So, that's Agenda 2063.

There's something different, Fred, this time around about the African Continental Free Trade Area that was launched on the first of January this year. It was supposed to have been launched mid last year. But of course, we all know what happened, the virus happened, right. And so it was postponed and launched January 1.

What is different, as I've mentioned throughout this conversation, is the newfound solidarity among African policymakers. And that's what His Excellency, Wamkele Mene, the head of the Secretary, the Secretary General of the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat, in Accra, Ghana, clearly laid out in the brilliant essay he authored for us, in Foresight, Africa, this particular edition.

Let me share with you that essay shows that this is not the old Africa. We now have a continent working in collaboration and committed to uplift the well-being of its people. Like

most economic integration schemes the world over in Asia, in Latin America, and indeed the EU in Europe that you mentioned, trade liberalization has been, and always has been accorded a great deal of attention. You lower tariffs and we will trade with each other and we'll get, attend, you know, the kingdom, right.

Every study I have recently read from the African Development Bank, from the World Bank, the IMF, the African EXIM Bank and others expect indeed that the African Continental Free Trade Area will bring about increased trade between African countries. And the Secretariat in Ghana recognizes that tariff reduction alone will not be the magic bullet to substantially boost intra African Trade and Development.

This is why the Secretary from the very start is focusing attention on soft infrastructure to capitalize on digital technology and social networks. These are important area. The Secretariat also recognizes that the greatest gains from the African Continental Free Trade Area will come from two things, trade facilitation and the elimination of what economists call non-tariff barriers.

What are these? Basically, if you look at the world as a whole, Africa has the highest non-tariff barrier costs. These are weaknesses in infrastructure, railways, highways, roads, bridges, airports, seaports, broadband we talked about earlier. So, overcoming, in my view, these non-tariff barriers is essential to reap the full benefits of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area.

It's interesting that the Secretariat is actually in Accra, Ghana, right. Because the father of Africa's integration was President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, right. And he had envisioned an integrated continent with unparalleled connectivity back in the '60s. So, to realize Kwame Nkrumah's dreams, we'll need railway lines connecting the Indian Ocean in East Africa to the Atlantic Ocean in West Africa.

Now, these dreams were in the 60s. Still today there is no such railroad, rail line. We will

need major highways, major highways crisscrossing the continent, from Cape Town to Cairo, to Dakar to Lagos to Addis Ababa to Nairobi. Such highways will be vital. So, developing such cross border infrastructure is the key to boosting economic growth and to transform the continent in order for us to achieve the vision of Nkrumah enshrined in the Africa AU Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want.

So, in my view, these are the things we need to do beyond the regular reductions of tariffs, if we're really to reap the full benefit. And with the new solidarity on the continent, I think we're very much on our way there.

DEWS: Well, you know, we could talk about every single chapter in the report. I mean again, it's a rich report and there's so many things going on in it. But in the interest of time, I wanted to ask you, Aloysius, if you would consider the new Biden Administration that just took power in Washington. And think about what do you think this Biden Administration needs to do with respect to Africa, in terms of things like trade, and investment, and even support for democracy?

ORDU: Yeah. Yeah. Very good question about the Biden-Harris Administration, which we're all very excited about. Expectations are very high, trust me, the world over, as you know. Canadians, Latin Americans, the Europeans, Asians, people in the Middle East, and of course, in Africa, we're all expecting a return to normalcy after the tumultuous past four years. Disrespectful allies and established norms, the rollback of globalization, the creator and the lack of institutions of governance, you know, and disregard for science based truths. Particularly at a time of unprecedented pandemic, global pandemic at that, those are clearly the, if you like, the last few years, right.

These were radical departures from the United States that we thought we knew. Think of

this from the perspective of the rest of the world that's what I'm talking about. So, that very U.S. we thought we knew was the richest and most powerful nation on Earth. And it behaved as such, right. That U.S. was an agenda setter on the global scene. It built strong alliances, it supported multilateralism, and represented a beacon of hope, democratic and good governance to which many aspired. And indeed that U.S. we all saw as a land of opportunity.

It's not surprising that every opinion poll, every survey in Africa, a majority of Africans express preference for the U.S. These are these any other nation or region on the planet. So, that's the reason for that, therefore.

So, the new Biden-Harris Administration is really, in my view, in New Dawn here at home and in the rest of the world. On the domestic front here at home, it has to decisively win a battle against the pandemic and resuscitate the ailing U.S. economy. The U.S. economy is far too important for the rest of the world.

It has to tackle race relations. It has to rebuild trust in a severely divided nation until renewed institutions of governance. Fred, these are humongous tasks, right. So, what do I think of the Biden Administration, Biden-Harris Administration should do with respect to Africa? The more I reflect on this, I think of an eight point agenda for action.

First, a nuanced approach to the U.S. relations with Africa is called for at this time. That entails a change of tone, more listening, more respect, building trust, and genuine, I mean genuine partnership. Lecturing African leaders, as was done in the recent past, has not been very helpful. A reset in trade policy, boosting investments and collaborations in security and climate change will be particularly important.

Second, openness to lessons from Africa. On race relations, for example, Fred, truth and reconciliation. South Africa has a bucket load of lessons for the United States, in fact people

ignore history frequently looking back to 1986. We all vividly recall then Senator Biden, his very strong support for Black South Africa, and his passionate repeal of the then U.S. policy in South Africa. It bodes well therefore, in my view, that President Biden's first call with an African head of state was with the President of South Africa, President Ramaphosa.

Third, on the pandemic, while the challenge of vaccinating over 300 million Americans is indeed daunting, we must not forget the plight of the 1.2 billion Africans who also need access to vaccines at reasonable costs. Right. The African union is working very collaboratively right now to secure vaccines for the continent. The Biden-Harris Administration has a key role to play to ensure that no African is left behind.

Fourth, on that agenda, as I mentioned earlier, a most compelling demonstration of African solidarity is the recent African Continental Free Trade Area that was launched. And unflinching, I mean unflinching support by the Biden-Harris Administration to this continental initiative is paramount in my view. So, also is U.S.'s support for Africa CDC and the order continental initiatives going on in Africa.

The fifth item I want to emphasize is the African Growth and Opportunities Act, AGOA. And as you know, Fred, this Act provides tariff free access to the U.S. market for African manufacturers. Here too, the Biden-Harris Administration has an important opportunity to support the renewal of AGOA, because this AGOA will be coming up 2025 or so, and in negotiations to renew it will be during this very first time of the Biden-Harris Administration.

And so support for the renewal with a far greater effort on the commercial and investment aspects will be particularly important, I believe, it's an opportunity for a continental and collaborative approach rather than pursuing country by country bilateral trade deals, which are clearly very expensive for Africa, and certainly very expensive for the United States

Administration.

The sixth is rejoining the WHO as we all saw on his first day was indeed the smart thing to do. No question in my mind about it. And U.S. strong support for Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Managing Director of the World Bank and former Finance Minister of Nigeria, who is now absolutely the person, the world has agreed to be the first African ever to lead as Director General of the WHO is particularly warranted. The thing stopping it from happening? You guessed it, the U.S. government. And the Biden-Harris Administration absolutely needs to support the rest of back that candidacy.

The seventh thing I wanted to mention is that U.S. support to the African Development Fund and the World Bank's IDA, are very, very important, Fred. Because you see these institutions focus on low income Africa. In some of these countries, the pandemic has compounded preexisting conditions, insecurity, fragility, and the ravages of climate change.

So, in responding expeditiously to the pandemics, the African Development Fund, and IDA, have used up a large part of their firepower, which was designed initially to fight poverty. So, should these institutions seek special replenishment this spring, in a couple of months, as I expect they might, right, the Biden-Harris Administration will do well to support them, so that they can continue to fight against poverty in low income countries in Africa.

And the eighth, as you know, is Africa's needs are absolutely enormous. Institution building, governance, health, education, agriculture, energy, railways, highways, you name it, broadband infrastructure, the needs are just enormous, that, Fred, Africa is open for business. And opportunities abound for the United States' companies and other entities to do business on the continent, to help us create jobs for Africa's burgeoning population of the youths.

The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, DFC, Prosper Africa, Power

Africa, the Millennium Challenge Call, Fred, these are excellent building blocks with which to unleash U.S. commercial investment and trade relations with Africa. So, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. The U.S. has the tools, the new Administration just needs to get on with that job.

DEWS: Well, thank you Aloysius for offering that incredible set of policy recommendations. That's exactly what listeners to the Brookings Cafeteria podcast tune in to hear. And if I may step outside my own lane for a second and offer one other recommendation to the Biden-Harris Administration, it is to pick up a copy of Foresight Africa 2021 and read it and share it throughout the new Administration.

ORDU: You are so kind, Fred, thank you.

DEWS: As we wrap up our conversation here today, is there anything else that you would want listeners to know about the Foresight African Report, or your work more generally, that we haven't covered?

ORDU: We couldn't ask for more advertisement than you recommending to your readers and listeners to pick up a copy, so that's fine. And we're very grateful for that.

About me, my wife and I, we live here in Chevy Chase, Maryland. We have three adorable grown up kids pursuing their passions in Brooklyn, New York, in London and Vienna, Austria. Drama, theater, particularly French Shakespeare, and reading biographies, you can see behind me here, are of particular interest to me.

I believe that soccer, Americans call it soccer, football in the rest of the world, is by far the greatest sport on earth. And I also believe that gardening, swimming, biking and long walks are great for the soul.

About my work, while joining Brookings at this phase in my career is indeed very



exciting, I feel very privileged and humbled. My colleagues are wonderful. I mean, you, everybody, global, and of course AGI team as well, committed and passionate. What I've found is as I walk in the corridors, which I would have done, because of the pandemic I'm having these conversations online with various scholars in Brookings. And I find everybody I talked to very passionate about the African continent, which is fantastic.

But on research areas, here are three areas that I intend to pursue as Director of AGI. Development financing, debt, and domestic resource mobilization, issues we covered in this conversation. These are important areas of research for me. Regional and continental integration in Africa, following the fortunes of the newly formed African Continental Free Trade Area will be particularly important to me in the period ahead.

And then Africa's infrastructure, a theme that you see recurred in this conversation as well, infrastructure and business environment in a digital era. These are areas that I want to spend a little bit of my time, in addition to fundraising of course, and convening because convening African policymakers and others will be very, very important in the period ahead.

And finally, making sure that African voices are heard in the new Administration, of course, as well as in Congress and congressional settings, will be very, very important. So, as you can see, we don't have too much to do, right. So, --

DEWS: Not too much, not that is a huge agenda. Well, Aloysius, I just want to say it's been a delight to meet you, even in this virtual setting, and to learn about you and especially your work. And also to talk about the Foresight Africa 2021 Report, which is I think one of the most important and impactful annual pieces of research that the Brookings Institution puts out every year. So, again, thank you for sharing with us your time and your expertise today.

ORDU: Fred, I am so grateful. Thank you very much for your time as well. Thank you.

DEWS: Aloysius Uche Ordu is the Director of the Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution and a Senior Fellow in the Global Economy Development Program. And you can find out more about the Foresight Africa 2021 Report on our website, Brookings.edu.

A team of amazing colleagues helps make the Brookings Cafeteria possible. My thanks to Audio Engineer Gaston Reboredo. To Bill Finan, Director of the Brookings Institution Press who does the book interviews. To my communications colleagues, Marie Wilken, Adrianna Pita and Chris McKenna for their collaboration. And finally, to Camilo Ramirez and Andrea Risotto for their guidance and support. Our podcast intern this semester is David Greenburg. The Brookings Cafeteria is brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network, which also produces Dollar and Sense, the Current and our Events podcasts. Email your questions and comments to me at [bcp@brookings.edu](mailto:bcp@brookings.edu). If you have a question for a scholar include an audio file and I'll play it in the answer on the air. Follow us on Twitter at a Policy Podcasts. You can listen to the Brookings Cafeteria in all the usual places. Visit us [online@brookings.edu](mailto:online@brookings.edu). Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.

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