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TOP PRIORITIES FOR AFRICA IN 2021

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Opening Remarks:

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Panel:

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Goodwill Ambassador, United Nations Population Fund
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Executive Director, UNAIDS
Under-Secretary-General, United Nations

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. ORDU: Good morning and good afternoon to the online audience here in the United States, in Africa, and around the world. Today we launch Foresight Africa 2021, the flagship report of Brookings Africa Growth Initiatives (AGI).

My name is Aloysius Ordu. I'm a senior fellow and director of AGI here at Brookings Institution. It is indeed with great pleasure that I welcome you all. To join our conversation this morning, please use #ForesightAfrica.

For over a decade now, Foresight Africa has aimed to showcase the top priorities for our continent in the coming year. While Foresight Africa 2021 is no different, the times we face are unprecedented. And so are many of the new challenges we are facing.

Let me share with you a couple of features in this year's report.

First of all, we have maintained Brookings's well-established tradition of quality, independence, and practical solutions to development problems for impactful outcomes.

Second, this year's report features a number of innovations aimed at spotlighting the continent's innovative young people. We introduce new voices at the frontiers of Africa's social and economic transformation. Most notably, talented young entrepreneurs that are bullish about Africa's prospects against all odds.

Third, we highlight the role of women in global leadership. You'll notice that each chapter is introduced by a quote from an eminent woman, all of whom demonstrate competence and credibility. These women have served or are serving the world in positions of trust and responsibility. They are excellent role models and inspire us all. I believe that these eminent persons symbolize what young girls in Africa and around the world aspire to be, that the sky is the limit to what they can achieve if given the opportunity. We're particularly grateful to each and every one of these eminent women for choosing to share their informed wisdom with us in this year's report.

Now, about the subject matter of the report. I believe we'll all agree that if there was ever a black swan, COVID-19 was it. A virus that unleashed devastating impacts to our way of life, the way we work, the way we socialize, the way we travel. It's with this in mind that we organized this year's report.

Now, let me turn to some of the things you will find in the report. In chapter one, the

“great reset.” Our contributors see the pandemic as a chance for Africa to reboot and to emerge stronger and better and they offer strategies for achieving that goal.

In chapter two, we cover support for public health, to shore up Africa’s health systems in preparation for the future. One thing we can be sure of is that the next pandemic is not a matter of if, but when.

Chapter three reminds us that we cannot give up on the remarkable human development gains of recent years, and so discusses human development with measures to protect our vulnerable populations, especially young African girls whose education and well-being have been severely curtailed.

Chapter four covers the private sector, entrepreneurs, small and medium-scale enterprises, moms and pops and traders up and down our markets on the continent. Their role will be particularly important to help the region recover and continue to create sorely needed jobs for our burgeoning population of youths.

Chapter five covers continental integration with a discussion of the evident solidarity exemplified by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the key roles of other African institutions at the frontiers of our continent’s development.

Finally, in chapter six, we underscore how governance and measures to build trust between people and their leaders play a key role in achieving the goals discussed in the various chapters of the report.

Now, here’s a key message we convey in the report. That now is the time to act. The virus is a wakeup call. It’s a timely reminder that we should do things differently, and above all else, we do things on solidarity. COVID-19 is a vivid illustration of our climate change and infectious diseases can conspire and sneak up on humanity unless we mend our ways.

Despite these humungous challenges, we, at the African Growth Initiative at Brookings, we believe that there are reasons to be hopeful. That’s evident solidarity and a new-found kind of “we” feeling among Africa’s leaders. And this is exemplified in a number of ways. The successful launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area, January 1st this year; the expeditious launch of the Africa CDC in the immediate aftermath of the Ebola crisis in West Africa; and the imminent role out of the single African passport.

We convey this sense of optimism in the cover page of this year's report. At a time when globalization is under threat, we witness a newfound solidarity in Africa. While recognizing the havoc wreaked by COVID-19, we see Africa's shared response as a source of light illuminating the continent at dawn with the sun's rays of hope on burden in African from the virus's grip ushering in a new beginning, a new order, a new renaissance, if you like.

So on that note, it is with great pleasure that I introduce our moderator for this morning, one of Africa's finest daughters, Ms. Isha Sesay. Isha, as many of you know, is an accomplished journalist and an author. She's the founder of the W.E. Can Lead, a goodwill ambassador of the United Nations Population Fund, and a former anchor of CNN.

Isha, thank you again for agreeing to do this. I bid you a warm welcome, and over to you to guide us through the rest of the session today. Thank you.

MS. SESAY: Thank you so much for that kind introduction, Aloysius. It is wonderful to be with you.

Good morning. Good afternoon, everyone, from here on the West Coast. It is my great pleasure and honor to be with you on this Wednesday. I'm thrilled to be joining you to mark the launch of the 2021 edition of the Foresight Africa report published by Brookings's Africa Growth Initiative. I actually helped launch an edition a couple of years ago. That was back in 2019. And I was thinking about that as I prepared for this session, just how different life was then. 2019, I was in D.C. We were all crowded in a room, sitting next to each other, sharing a microphone, breathing over each other. And just without any of the cares and the considerations and the fears that have overtaken our lives today. Such a different time. That conversation back in 2019 was very much rooted in the idea of Africa's promise and it's peril into the opportunity that existed but the fears if Africa's youth weren't fully catered for, given opportunities they need to fulfill their potential and what that might mean for the continent.

Then we were talking about six of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world being in Africa. That was the narrative, that was the story. And then you fast-forward to us today here in 2021, and it's a completely different narrative. Everywhere we look the story is one of massive upheaval, human suffering, tragedy, economic turmoil. Case in point, to drive home the reality of the difference between then and now, I'm joining you via Zoom. I'm here in the United States where the COVID

pandemic has run riot. Twenty-five million cases and counting, over 400,000 lives lost. Hospitals stretched to the breaking point. The end of last year, nearly eight million people had fallen into poverty, and this is the richest country in the world and this is how hard it has been hit by COVID.

And now when we look at Africa, when we look at 54 countries, and we look at the devastating impact on the continent and we see cases which admittedly when we look at case counts is significantly lower. I mean, we're looking at just over three million cases in terms of deaths, and we're looking at around 87,000. Every death is tragic. I want to stress that. But comparatively, significantly lower than what we're seeing in the U.S. and other places. However, also I must add, case numbers rising on the continent now, concerns about this variant out of South Africa which shows greater transmissibility and could be even more detrimental to health, could lead to severe consequences. The data is still being assimilated.

But what you cannot deny is that on the continent the economic toll has been great. This is how Brahim Coulibaly, the former president or the former director of Africa Growth Initiative and now vice president of Global Economy and Development there at Brookings, here's how he summed it up on page nine of this year's report. "The COVID-19 pandemic is the most severe and widespread shock that African countries have experienced in 30 years. The collapse in economic activity has dried up revenues for public expenditures precisely at a time when more spending is needed to combat the pandemic and to shore up economies. Accordingly, debt levels further or significantly and soon more countries will either be in or at high risk of debt distress. Now the IMF estimates that the region will need an additional \$345 billion through 2023."

Given such a reality, today's conversation about what should be the top priorities for the continent is more critical than ever. Clearly, swift decision-making, coupled with clear-eyed prioritization is necessary. The deep understanding and long years of engagement with Africa makes the insight of our guests today invaluable, and I'm so grateful that they could join us for this conversation.

So please, from wherever you are in the world, clap -- from wherever you are, clap and join me in welcoming Winnie Byanyima, executive director of UNAIDS and under-secretary-general of the United Nations. Witney Schneidman is a senior international advisor for Africa at Covington and Burling LLP and is also a nonresident fellow, Global Economy and Development, Africa Growth Initiative. Vera

Songwe, under-secretary-general at the United Nations, executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, also a nonresident senior fellow, Global Economy and Development, Africa Growth Initiative. Also a part of today's conversation, Aloysius Ordu, director of Africa Growth Initiative. He will be part of the conversation.

So I want to welcome each and every one of you. Thank you again for interrupting your busy, busy day to be part of this critical conversation.

But before we hear from you I want to share with our audience the poll because the poll was released, the question was asked of all of you, what should be the priority for Africa in 2021 given the economic climate, given the toll of this pandemic? And the graphic is there on your screen so you can follow along with me.

And I was quite surprised by the way this broke down because clearly out in front approaching over 20% of you, certainly approaching 25% say relaunching African economies to be stronger and more inclusive should be the priority. Also, strengthening African businesses and creating jobs is clearly up there as a priority. And also, building trust between people and their leaders.

But what struck me is the fact that COVID was not the out-and-out winner considering the threat and the devastation caused by this disease. So I think COVID-19 and preparing for the new pandemic, you see how that rates there in this poll, not even in the top three priorities according to those who responded to this. Uniting revitalized Africa through regional collaboration also rating fairly low considering the fact that the Africa Free Trade Continental Agreement has just launched. So interesting, and I look forward to hearing from our panelists what they make of what topped the poll. But out there in front, relaunching African economies to be stronger and more inclusive, that is the result from the Foresight Africa 2021 public poll. Okay.

Well, with that as the backdrop, each of our speakers will now share their thoughts on what should be the priorities in 2021 for the continent. Each person will speak for about five minutes. Once they're done, we'll open it up to moderated conversation for about another half an hour. And then we get to the part of this program which is critical and is part of the reason why Africa Growth Initiatives this because it is meant to be a dialogue and your voice is critical to that. So then we will open it up to audience questions. Thank you in advance to everyone who sent in their questions. We'll try to get to as

many of them as we can. But first up, let's hear from our esteemed panel.

I'm going to start with Winnie. Winnie Byanyima, I want to start this conversation by hearing your thoughts, considerable concerns about what COVID will mean for human development gains of the past decade. Great concerns about what it means for, you know, childhood mortality. Many, many people looking at this moment and wondering where to turn next. What are your thoughts and what should be the priority for 2021?

MS. BYANYIMA: Thank you, Isha. Lovely to see you again after a long time. I'm delighted to be with my fellow panelists. I congratulate you, Aloysius and the Africa Growth Initiative on this year's Foresight Africa report. Thank you for inviting me.

Well, COVID-19 is not the first pandemic in Africa, neither is it the last. In 2014, Ebola hit three West African countries really hard, and at that time we said never again.

So, neither is COVID the only pandemic we are fighting right now. This year, 2021, marks 40 years since the first reported cases of AIDS. Forty years gone, that fight is not over yet.

In Africa we have 980,000 people who are infected with HIV every year, almost a million. Four hundred forty thousand people died from AIDS-related illnesses last year. And on the continent in Africa we have 25.8 million people living with HIV, and out of those, 8 million are still waiting for common treatment. So it's not even one pandemic. We have another one, and many other diseases. COVID has highlighted the fragility of our health and of our economy, and the closed link between our health and our economies.

So, I'm going to talk about four things that we need to do but they are things that Africa has to do but also has to do in our global context as well. We are part of a global economy. We cannot extricate. And some of what we have to do we have to do with others. So four things.

First, to organize health technologies as global public goods. This is critical. 9 out of 10 people on our continent won't get a vaccine, a COVID vaccine this year. If we are lucky, we might vaccinate 10%. A small group of rich countries representing only 14% of the entire population of the world have booked up all the vaccines available. Some of them have four to five times more than what they need and the rest of the world is waiting. And that's because we have a system of innovation and access to medicine that is profit led where governments don't have a handle on leading what to research

on, what medicine to come to market and what price it should be, and whose health gets cared for. The governments gave that up long ago.

So when we say people's vaccine, it's not just a slogan. We are asking for a transformation of the R&D system that we use to give people their right to health. We want to prevent monopolies on production of vaccines, deaths, and treatment. We are asking for affordable prices and transparency of pricing. These three, four, five, six vaccines available have been produced with public money and we want to know how much was public taxpayers' money, what is a reasonable profit for these companies, what's a fair price?

I was so angry when a few days ago I learned that South Africa, that country that has suffered the most, was paying twice as much for the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine as European Union companies. Twice as much. Their own people were used actually in the trials. They put themselves on the line. So we must move towards a way of producing health technologies where governments invest some money, companies invest monies but governments regulate and lead the research agenda so that investments are made in real needs of all people's health.

Secondly, we need to reorganize the international financial architecture so that it enables countries to address this crisis and the health and social needs of people. Here I want to talk about the situation of debt that Aloysius spoke to and you spoke to, Isha. That we can't be arguing about whether to cancel debt or suspend debt repayments. We have to act boldly to give the low-income countries of Africa and other parts of the world the opportunity to respond to this crisis by giving them the fiscal space they need. So the debt service, a special initiative doesn't go far enough, doesn't give enough time, should be legally binding, should go up to 2024 to give countries a real opportunity to emerge from the crisis.

Thirdly, we need to organize health financing through tax-funded public provisions. We've come to believe that governments can't afford to give people health care. That health care has to be sold to them through kinds of arrangements with the private sector. The evidence is there. In any country where all people have been given their right to health, can access health care, it has been driven primarily by public provision. That's the reality. We need to get back behind that and find ways to finance publicly the health of people with some contributions from the regions with the private sector, but making

sure that those for who can't buy, there is health care for them.

Fourth, social, labor, and fiscal policy to tackle inequalities that drive vulnerabilities, health vulnerabilities. Here, I'm talking about the policies we need first. Tax reform to enable our countries to collect their entitled revenues. We need a global corporate tax reform that will enable us to have these companies and rich people pay their fair share in order to pay for services. This is the time for it. The global financial crisis brought about some reform of taxation, global taxation through the OECD BIPS process. It didn't go far enough but now this crisis should lead us through a more ambitious reform to bring about the revenues we need. We need labor reform. We've seen just how our frontline workers have suffered on the frontlines. Valuable taxi drivers, bus drivers, shop assistants, health workers, all these people have lost their right of collective bargaining and they've been vulnerable. Now is the time to give people a living wage and that has been negotiated globally. No one is going to give a living wage and have businesses shipping out. So some social contract that assures workers their rights in a global economy, their right to health, to work in safe and healthy environments and to have a living wage.

And lastly, by social policy I mean social protection. What has been happening now, we've seen even the poorest countries coming out to support with different initiatives, people in this context of COVID helping them pay their rents, helping them pay their power and so on. These should translate into more prominent forms of social protection across the world. There are always those people, there will always be in every country people who need a safety net. At least safety nets have also not been treated as critical. They've been also, if you can now we should make them a must.

So those for me are policies that we must put in place in Africa but some of which we must negotiate globally for them to take root.

Thank you, Isha.

MS. SESAY: Winnie, thank you so much for that. I couldn't agree with you more, this issue around vaccine nationalism and the situation we find ourselves in where countries have more than enough several times over and we don't know how, you know, people on the continent will get a vaccine to be discussed in the conversation ahead.

I want to hand it over to Vera, Vera Songwe now to get her perspective.

Vera, from where you sit, obviously, with the Economic Commission for Africa, you have

an up-close view of the economic fallout from this pandemic. What's your view of the road ahead and how priorities should be structured?

MS. SONGWE: Thank you, Isha.

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening to everybody wherever you are joining us. We hope that the next Foresight Africa 2022 we will be able to do in the beautiful rooms and conferences of the Brookings Institute and the Africa Growth Initiative.

Let me also join in congratulating the new head of the Africa Growth Initiative, Aloysius, for his first Foresight Africa. They always say that when you take over during a crisis then by definition you have to do better. So this is a good time to be taking over the AGI. It is a good time in Washington to be taking over the AGI because hopefully there is going to be some listening.

Listen, I think two things first before we go into the future. Let me just talk a little bit about the past. And I think the past, 2020 in particular, summarizes two things for Africa and two messages I think coming out of Africa. One of them is resilience. I think in March of 2020 there was this huge, you know, swell, ground swell of Africa's debt and Africa is going to collapse, and which one of them is going to come down crashing first. And it was this sort of sense of let's just wait and see how they crash and then we will come after it. And I think, you know, the first thing that happened was really the sort of collective resilience. It came and in a coordinated way African ministers of finance came together, African leaders, President Cyril Ramaphosa came together. We created collective coordinated systems to respond to the crisis. So as Brahim Coulibaly said from Brookings, you know, the first recession for Africa in 25 years, we didn't go down, you know, desperate and Africans were able to raise \$49 billion of their own resources to respond to the crisis. Countries gave tax holidays to their citizens almost synonymous to what was happening in Europe. And I think as we go into 2021, that's an important message to take with us was that resilience.

The second thing I think that happened was, you know, a message about divergence on the continent. I think we have always looked at the continents of the low-income countries, you know, oh, my God, you know, that is that continent with so many low-income countries. Today we have 25 middle-income countries and counting. And hence, the response to the crisis is no longer the same. It's not let's just, you know, do that forgiveness for everybody. No. Those countries are going to the markets.

There's Egypt. There's Morocco. There's Ghana. There's Benin. And Cote d'Ivoire recently that want to keep market access. Africa's debt structures have fundamentally changed.

Actually, our debt is no longer all debt to the multilateral development banks. It's debt to private institutions. It's debt to the markets. Because we are growing. Because Kenya is getting debt from the markets to build its infrastructure. And Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal. And we have countries like Seychelles and Botswana and Namibia that are middle-income countries. And I think the world last year began to understand that Africa was a single continent but with such a varied diversity of incomes. And we also have Nigeria, which is the country today with the largest population of poor people or where poverty is the highest in the world. And so again, a different approach. And I think the path of 2020 was really understanding how does the world deal with this divergent Africa. We couldn't just sort of treat them as one big monolithic block and, you know, throw a debt service suspension initiative and everybody would be fine or, you know, we needed more market access. We needed an injection of liquidity into our continent. But because people didn't understand that it took a lot longer.

So these are two things I just want to put there from 2020 going into 2021. We were lucky because as the rest of the world was trying to understand this new Africa, which was able to come up and set up its own systems to deal with the crisis and not just come running. And I remember a friend of mine saying, you know, this is one crisis where people will not be running from the West into Africa. Nobody was traveling; right? Africa was left to itself, and Africa came up with institutions that could respond to the crisis.

Now, going forward, it's no surprise when you look at your survey that everybody says it's the economics, stupid, because it is the economics. It's jobs. We need to get our jobs back. But more importantly, on a continent where we have a huge degree of the informant sector, how do we do that? What do we do to ensure that we don't lose those small and medium enterprises for good?

And I think fortuitously an amazing thing happened on January 1, 2020. The coming into light of the African continent the Free Trade Area Agreement. This is Africa's blueprint to restore growth. This is Africa's blueprint to get energy going. And essentially, you know, we talk about the COVID-19 crisis and we know we're going into phase two and hopefully not into phase three, but the numbers, we're losing 32,000 people a day now, 32,000 people a day are getting COVID on the continent. The number

has tripled from where we were in March of 2020. So there has to be a quick response.

But I think as we look at the AfCFTA, as we look at Africa opening its borders to 1.3 billion people, selling pharmaceuticals, you know, we will produce them in South Africa. We will produce them hopefully in Senegal, in Egypt, in Kenya, and we will sell on the continent.

One of the things that happened when COVID hit is that the Europeans closed their markets to Africa for the procurement of pharmaceuticals. The East, China, India, closed their markets. The reaction to that again, Africa's unique resilience was can we do it on the continent? We started standing up industry that could respond. And I think this final decision to say, yes, we can do those things and we can do them better ourselves has been an incredible I think realization.

Climate change. We are talking about COVID, but Africa loses somewhere between 5 to 15% of GDP every year on climate change. Mozambique, you know, the other day I was listening to the prime minister of Fiji talking about 36% of their GDP was wiped out in three days. Something similar happened in Mozambique, 16-17% of its GDP. We need to start looking at how we begin to do climate resilient agriculture and climate resilient infrastructure. And this is not about somebody has told us to do it. It's because when you do climate green recovery, you actually create more jobs. It is a much more sustainable, much more job-creating. And the Economic Commission for Africa is about to put out a report that is going to show us how many more jobs you can actually create by saving water which we don't have enough of on the continent, particularly in the areas of the Sahara.

ICT technology I think is another area where we have seen just the youth. Amazing. You know, we talk about SMEs and the potential to create SMEs on the continent. If we can stand the power technology sectors I think we will begin to see huge growth. We've seen amazing examples in Benin when you arrive at the airport. Because of COVID, we are building our ICT systems. You know, on a smart app, they start tracing you all over Togo to see where you are, at your hotel. If you leave your room before the 24 hours, the thing rings and somebody from the health system calls you. So these are the kinds of things we are doing on the continent. This is the technology that is coming up on the continent.

I think finally, finance. Yes, we are doing better but we still have and we will still need liquidity to get out of this crisis. We are working with the World Bank, the IMF to ask for \$100 billion of

additional support, \$500 billion in special drug rights to ensure that the private sector has access to a lot more capital. I think that we have helped the public sector. But again, this is the world thinking of Africa as we thought about Africa 20 years ago. Africa today has a robust, strong, and solid private sector.

In the United States, a lot of the stimulus packages are going to ensure that corporations don't go bankrupt. Who is doing that for African corporations? We need SDRs to be able to come and put forward so that we can do that. And I think that is the package. It's making sure climate change -- we must -- we talk about taxes, and Winnie, thank you for talking about taxes, but there is a part of the taxation that we're not talking about enough. It's carbon taxes. Africa is doing so much in terms of mitigating the global climate crisis. You know, we have carbon sinks across the continent. Why can't we price carbon so that Africa can get a lot more revenue? I think these are the kinds of questions that we can now talk about as we talk about a new financial architecture. And that is what gives hope to the resilient Africa of 2020, which is probably a little bit stressed in 2021 but has some solutions where we need global partnerships to get out. Thank you.

MS. SESAY: Vera, thank you. It's absolutely critical to get your view of the economic landscape. And I'm glad you stressed the resilience and also made the point that it did feel, at least from where I sat, that much of the world was almost -- I don't want to say waiting, not joyfully, but certainly with the kind of expectation that it was all going to go wrong for Africa and they would be there to right all the pieces and to have all the reports of how we failed again and needed to be saved. So I'm glad you stressed the resilience and the cooperation between leaders on the continent. Still more to do but we have to acknowledge the great success the first time around. Thank you for that.

Witney, I want to bring you in now. And really get your perspective from where you sit as someone who has done a lot of work on the continent, has been following it closely, and also, your perspective of what this new administration that has come in, what their priorities should be as they engage the continent, how they should frame this relationship bearing in mind, of course, you know, America itself is grappling with a battered economy, social instability, and many, many other problems. It's democratic star is not gleaming as much as it once was after everything it's been through the past four years. So talk to me about the road ahead and engagement in U.S.-Africa relations.

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: Great. Thanks, Isha, for that question.

Just let me add to the comment, it's great to be on this panel. And to everybody listening, let me just sing the praises of Isha's book "Under the Tamron Tree." It's really quite an important contribution.

And welcome, Aloysius, too, in your leadership of AGI. As Vera said, the time is right and we're just thrilled to have you among us. And a shoutout to Vera and Winnie as well.

Look, I think what we've discussed today has been so important. And from where I sit, and looking at the U.S.-Africa landscape, I think, as Vera did, it's important to take a look back for a second because I think, you know, there have been several distinct phases of the U.S.-African engagement, and I think we're actually at an inflection point. You know, the first phase from independence through the end of the Cold War can be described as zero sum. You're either for us or you're against us. You know, you support the Soviet Union or the United States. We're going to give you aid or not. You know, it was donor recipient.

But with the end of the Cold War, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, a month later there was 40,000 people in the streets in Porto-Novo, Benin, and the beginning of Africa's democracy movement took off and we're still seeing that today. The growth of civil society.

You know, I think from then to today, to 2020, the (inaudible) globalization certainly took hold across the continent, and I think the U.S. responded pretty effectively beginning with the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act in 2000. Because what that did was that changed the zero sum proposition to a positive sum proposition. We're saying we want to move from (inaudible). We want to move to mutual gain and mutual benefit. We want to move to positive sum. And that's when the U.S. Congress got involved. And as fractured as the American body of politics is, the most reliably bipartisan dimension is when it comes to Africa and U.S.-Africa. And this bipartisanship in the U.S. Congress not only has sustained AGOA and its extension to the year 2025, but it's underpinned this architecture of programs that I think are highly relevant, first off with PEPFAR. And you know, the tremendous U.S. response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 2000s. But other programs such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation, you know, Feed the Future. The Young Africa Leaders Initiative has been a stunning program. We've had about 5,000 of Africa's best and brightest young folks come to the United States for leadership training. I'd like to think that we've had 5,000 Amanda Gormans. You know, the young woman who was so

stunning at our inauguration. It's that caliber of individuals who have come to the United States to really connect Africa and the U.S. in a new way. And most recently, the creation of the U.S. Development Finance Corporation and Prosper Africa.

So I think the architecture is in place to really just deepen the relationship between the United States and Africa. But clearly, we are at an inflection point.

You know, the U.S. is going through a financial crisis. Isha, as you said at the outset, you know, the COVID pandemic is running riot in the United States. So the mindset here is how do we build back better; right? And I think the question is what role is Africa, you know, what's the role of Africa as the U.S. goes to build back better? And at the same time, you know, what's the role of the United States as Africa goes to build back better? And I think that's sort of a different kind of questioning.

I was struck, you know, by the poll. The number one result is that people on the continent want the economies to be more inclusive. Well, that's what Americans want, too. There's a profound inequality. Profound systemic racism. How do we address those issues? And that's sort of what we're grappling with. So I think as we look, you know, to the coming years, and as we look to the Biden administration there's not going to be a magic bullet. That's for sure. But I think what those programs and those bipartisanship point out is that there's a lot of people who get Africa and understand Africa in the United States who will be going into this administration, who will be working with this administration from the outside. And I think we can move to a much better place.

You know, there are some tough issues to address right off the bat. You take trade and investment. You know, how do we increase America investment? As someone figured the other day that American companies in Kenya employ some 6,000 people. How do we double that over the next five years? You know, the issue of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement has to be, number one, in terms of America (inaudible), how do we help accelerate the implementation of the AfCFTA in such a way that it promotes U.S.-African trade, you know?

The Trump administration started the U.S.-Kenya Free Trade Agreement. Vera pointed to the fact that there are 25 middle-income countries on the continent. Maybe it's time for a free trade agreement between the U.S. and a sub-Saharan African country. We have one in Morocco. If we do that, how do we do that in the context of the implementation of the AfCFTA? How can they both be

mutually reinforcing?

And then, you know, 25 middle-income countries. Well, there are others that aren't and they could probably benefit from AGOA being more relevant. AGOA is going to expire in 2025, so how do we start thinking about that? And what does a post-AGOA relationship look like? So that's clearly one basket of issues.

We can't turn away from the security issues in the Sahel, in Somalia, in Northern Mozambique. Security is at the heart of everything we do. You write about it so, you know, precisely in your book and it's happening across the continent. And we need to deepen our partnerships, not just with African governments but with the E.U. and other nations who care and want to get involved with this.

I think many of the health issues, you know, they are front and center. I mean, President Ramaphosa put it precisely yesterday when he spoke to the World Economic Forum and he said, you know, we are all not safe if some countries are vaccinating their people and other countries are not vaccinating. It doesn't get any clearer than that. What I would like to see, and I'm hopeful that once this administration really gets in place we can see sort of another PEPFAR as it relates to COVID vaccines. You know, the U.S. at the forefront put the U.S. in partnership with all nations who have the capacity to produce vaccines, including African nations, making sure that these vaccines not only are available but they're distributed as well. I mean, we're dealing with this where I live in Alexandria, Virginia. There are some 20,000 people who signed up for the vaccine. They have 2,000 doses available in my community.

So this inequality is playing out all across the world and that's what we have to be sensitive to. But I'm very confident that we can get there because I think we have people in the Biden administration, starting with the president, certainly with the vice president, a woman of color from the diaspora, who understands the continent. And other folks, Linda Thomas Greenfield, who is going through her hearings as we speak to be our ambassador to the United Nations. Samantha Powers, head of USAID. People who understand inequality, who understand how to overcome inequality.

So, you know, I'm cautiously optimistic. I think we need to pump the brakes a little bit in terms of expectations and give this administration time to get in place but we can't back away one iota from the dialogue and the engagement with each other in coming up with the ideas, coming up with the blueprints, not just for the U.S. government but for what this new architecture can look like.

So with those thoughts, let me turn it back to you. Thanks.

MS. SESAY: Witney, thank you. Thank you for that very clear-eyed assessment of how, excuse me, the relationship between Africa and this new administration could operate. I think you said many salient points. And also, that key point you made about it being America working with and being a partner in what comes next. I think that's absolutely critical and would be welcomed on the continent.

Let's move on to a broader conversation now and then we'll move on to the audience questions. I'm keeping an eye on the time.

But I do want to pick up on something that Witney said because it was very much top of mind for me just as he said it. And Vera, it's to you.

As you talk about the promise and the potential of the AfCFTA, how do we turbocharge that? How do we make it as impactful as it could be?

MS. SONGWE: Thank you. Thank you, Isha.

I think three things that we could do to turbocharge it. One is as with any new thing that happens is more communication. Ensuring that more people understand. You know, when we talk about the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement, we actually are talking about taking away tariffs. Overall, we have an average above 16.3% tariffs on goods that move around the continent. What we do not quantify often and what many people, young women, young entrepreneurs out there face are the nontariff barriers. If you try to quantify them, they are about 16.3%. 600 pieces of paper to move goods in East Africa. Maybe three times that much moving goods in West Africa or Central Africa where I come from. You know, it's this paperwork. It's this crushing paperwork where a small or medium enterprise business can just not survive. This is the secret of the CFTA. And I think this is the story that we have to tell more of.

The second thing about the CFTA is pooling of resources. We need on the continent today to create, you know, unicorn businesses. We need more Aliko Dangotes. We need more Naguib Sawiris from Egypt. We need more (inaudible). We need a lot more of them. We cannot have each of them in Botswana with seven million people or in, you know, Ghana with 36 million people. We need 1.3 billion people to create that industry of, you know, giants. And I think that is what the CFTA is doing. It's going to create the possibility.

And let's talk about vaccines, for example. You know, the Aspen Institute down in South Africa, it's going to be creating 300 million vaccines for Germany and the West. Why not for Africa if it has that market and it's looking? Senegal is the only African country that has been producing vaccines in the past. They can grow into huge vaccine centers but they need the demand from the rest of the continent. Senegal could use vaccines for itself. That's not where I'm going. Anyway, I'm sorry (inaudible) overnight. (Inaudible) in India exists because it's, you know, billions of people out there, you know, using that market.

But one thing I forgot to say in my introduction is governance. And all of this, you know, ambition that we have and I believe that we can deliver on will not work if we do not, you know, ensure that our governance (inaudible) come back. Mo Ibrahim, unfortunately, as we were launching the CFTA, you know, the Mo Ibrahim Index for the first time came out saying Africa is going backwards on governance. We're going backwards on peace and security. We're going backwards on the rule of law. And we can see that. We don't need to be told that. You know, there's more guns going off on the continent than there have ever been in the last 10 years. So we cannot I think get out of COVID, fight climate change, ensure that, you know, we stop inequality and reduce poverty if we're going in the wrong direction on leadership, on governance, on transparency.

But the good news I think is that our civil society with technology has become more vigilant, is putting out more messages. We know that we are going backwards because we can actually see it and we can quantify it. So that's a little bit the positive is a negative; right? But it's an important part I think of the work that we need to do going forward is just ensuring that we build -- and we saw it. It's difficult. I think that the joke that Africans make about, you know, now America cannot give us lessons. No, America can and America should because America survived. America came out on the other side.

On the night when there was about to be a coup d'état, the opposition leader went out and installed the winner. That's the kind of institution we need on the continent. We need those institutions that are solid, that ensure that transparency happens, that our leadership is consistent and that we can actually have transitions that are peaceful where people talk to each other. And I think that is the big lesson coming out of America, and I think we should continue to talk about how we strengthen

those institutions to be able to build everything else, even on the transparency with the COVID crisis we're going to need those institutions.

MS. SESAY: Vera, thank you for that.

Aloysius, I'd love to bring you in at this point so you can weigh in, particularly on this governance piece and what it is that we should be looking for in the months ahead of 2021.

MR. ORDU: Sure. Thank you. Thank you very much, Isha.

On your earlier remark you used the words very carefully, what do we do to turbocharge the African Continental Free Trade Area. And of course, Vera outlined many of the things we need to do.

I just wanted to mention that at the end of the day, like all integration schemes across the world, the focus has always been on tariffs and it's no different here because about 90% of goods will be tariff free within the African continent as we go forward.

If our continent, I think before (inaudible) regions, the biggest challenge as Vera talked about had nontariff barriers. In our economic speak, we forget that those things are essentially infrastructure -- runways, highways, roads, bridges, airports, seaports, broadband access. Right? Overcoming this in my view is the most important way to turbocharge the African Continental Free Trade Area. In fact, the founding father of Africa's integration, Kwame Nkrumah, he was very clear he envisioned an integrated continent with unparalleled connectivity. To realize this dream we will need railway lines from the East African Indian Ocean all the way to the Atlantic Ocean in West Africa. We will need highways crisscrossing the continent, Cape Town to Cairo, Dakar, Addis Ababa. These are the sort of things we will need to do, developing cross-border infrastructure which will boost growth and take us to the promised land, the Africa we want as enshrined in the Agenda 2063.

And very quickly, Witney had also mentioned the new administration which I wanted to touch up on if you don't mind very, very quickly. Because all the points he made are very, very relevant. The challenges facing the Biden-Harris administration are enormous. What is also clear is that as the richest and most powerful nation on earth there are responsibilities (inaudible). We need a much more nuanced approach to U.S. relations with Africa. A change of tone. More listening. More respect. More building of trust and genuine partnerships.

You know, we saw four years of lecturing African leaders. Clearly, as he mentioned, that

time we hope is over. Right? Openness to learn from Africa. Let's be very, very clear. On race relations, truth and reconciliation. South Africa has a bucket load of lessons for the United States. We look back to 1986 for those who treasure history. We recall vividly the dancing after Biden. His strong support for Black South Africa and his passionate rebuke of the then-U.S. policy on the continent. It bodes well now in my view that Biden himself, you know, is the president, and his first call as we all know was with President Ramaphosa of South Africa.

So these are all very, very important. And of course, the support to the African Continental Free Trade Area and Not Leave Anybody Behind is important.

There are also a couple of ways the new administration can definitely support and make a mark. Rejoining WHO was obviously the smartest thing to do. But, you know, Dr. Nguzi Okonjo-Iweala, former managing director of the World Bank, former finance minister, former foreign minister of Nigeria. Pretend as Africa's first-ever director general of WTO. What's stopping it? The U.S. and this administration. This is the time to really send that message very, very quickly.

And then finally, we all know that the African Development Fund and the World Bank's IDA, which are the low-income windows of these great institutions. Now, they both have firepower as we know in their recent replenishments. Guess what? COVID has really, really meant that they've used up a lot of that firepower. So the likelihood that these two institutions will be coming back this spring to look for additional replenishment in order to address the needs of the poor up and down Africa, you know, low-income Africa, fragile states, etc., I think a very strong U.S. support under the new administration, I think these are some of the ways they can demonstrate that it's a new dawn, which we all recognize in the change of personalities that Witney rightly mentioned. But I think acting and showing that they really are supportive of the continent will be very, very important. Thank you.

MS. SESAY: Thank you so much for that, Aloysius. Really very well said.

And Winnie, if I could turn to you. Vera, you know, she made the point that maybe it is the AfCFTA that the continent should be looking more to when it comes to solving this vaccine problem and getting enough of them to the population. I mean, what is your thought as a way forward to deal with this issue? Clearly, moral imperative, a sense of fairness is not going to change this equation. They continue to buy up as much vaccine as they can. So for you, what is the way through this?

MS. BYANYIMA: Well, Isha, the secretary general of the United Nations has kept saying we are not safe until everyone is safe. We cannot but find global solutions to this problem. For us as Africa, I'm a very proud African today because like Vera has said, Africa hasn't been putting out a begging ball and just begging and crying and saying the worst is happening to us. No. Africa has a strategy. Right from the time this hit, a strategy was put in place for testing, contact tracing to make sure that each country is on top of knowing where the epidemic is and preventing. That alliance led by Africa's CDC led to in the first wave really a minimum number of infections on the continent because Africa prevented using all it knows about pandemics from the past.

Now with the second wave, again you see Africa's CDC and the African Union coming together and finding a collective way to try and acquire the vaccines, prepare for the rollout, and take it for them. (Inaudible) here is leading and supporting in the U.N., leading and supporting the African Union there.

What I'm seeing is that the problem right now is not prices, affordability; it is supply. We don't have enough. And the supply is limited deliberately by the few companies who have the technology, the intellectual property, deciding to keep their price up and limit supply and keep people dying while they supply those whom they get money from. We have to push harder.

There is a facility of COVAX, which really is the one about getting the crumbs. They grab the most and then you take what is left. That's basically what it is. It's hardly transparent. The African Union doesn't even know which vaccine are we getting, when are we getting it, at what price? Is it cost price? Is it profit price? All these details are not provided to us because the companies are holding onto their monopoly.

So I think we need wide engagement with COVAX to continue pressure. Pressing the companies, pressurizing the governments on a fair way forward. And this is about economics. This is about getting the whole economy, global economy to recover. It's not just about helping poor countries also to get a vaccine. It is to open the global economy by availing this. So we need to have a suspension of the trade rules at the TRIPS Council so that a resolution by South Africa and India goes through and that allows any country, any company that has the ability to go ahead and produce so that we maximize production.

It means also, even if that were to fail, going to the WHO CTAP. There is a pool called the COVID Technology Access Pool where technology can be shared. These pools have worked before. They worked for HIV Antiretrovirals where you can actually have a commodity that is produced genetically from other producers, licensed by the one who holds the intellectual property, and the price is different for different countries. And the same product is priced differently in rich markets and poorer markets. This formula works. These companies know it but they're just refusing because they want super profits in the middle of a crisis. So we want to keep pressure. And Africa can continue pressurizing.

But for now, I think we are doing the right thing. President Ramaphosa, working together with a group of entrepreneurs, African entrepreneurs, and African scientists are engaging the different producers, are securing as much vaccine as possible for our people, and are preparing rolling out on the ground, supporting African countries to prepare logistically to roll out the vaccine. We can do it but the global leadership is lacking. Africa is coming together to fight collectively but the rich countries are each looking inward in their own country and providing more leadership here. This is a global problem. No one will walk out of it by themselves.

So yeah, I am a proud African because we are doing the right things for ourselves, but the global rules are stacked against us. We've got to push hard to change them.

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: Isha, can I just jump in here because Winnie is hitting on a really important point and that is what is the role of the healthcare companies. You know, are they part of the problem or part of the solution?

Personally, I see them as part of the solution. And I think when you talk to the leadership of these countries, they want to make this vaccine as available as quickly as possible. And you know, I'm reminded during the HIV/AIDS crisis how any retrovirals used to be so expensive and how relatively quickly, maybe not quickly enough, three, four years, you know, we started to see generics become widely available. Governments were making them available at no cost. I like to believe that we can get there again and that the companies want to see that happening. They want to see a healthy world. They want their customers to be buying other drugs for them. So I guess I would be a little different in how I see the world of the life sciences companies and I think they want to be more a part of the solution than they are the problem at this point.

MS. SESAY: Winnie, do you want to respond?

MS. BYANYIMA: Yes. I want to agree with Witney that actually we should make sure that the lessons from the HIV epidemic are learned. Indeed, when antiretrovirals were found in the north, they were able to put their people on treatment to live longer and healthy lives. But it took another seven years before the prices came down so that people in the developing countries could also buy or get them free, both by their countries, and live long lives. In the meantime, we lost millions of people. So this time we're saying the lesson must be learned and nobody should die now.

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: Yes.

MS. BYANYIMA: We know that prices can come down and we know that these companies will not fail to make a profit. There is a way and we need to speak together to the companies.

I was very happy I heard President Biden speak in this direction, that he wants the vaccines to be availed at no cost at maximum production so that we raise out of the crisis. I think he said the right things. I hope he'll give the leadership and the rich companies need to put their pressure on their companies, pharmaceuticals, to come to the table and share the technology. I think we can do it.

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: Yes. I agree with you. And completely agree with your point about the need for leadership with President Biden, with other leaders from around the world, with the leaders of the life sciences companies, with civil society, individuals, you know, UNAIDS and yourself and others to really make sure that the solution is fast-tracked and that it's really done in the next 24 to 36 months. I think it's totally possible to do.

MS. BYANYIMA: It is.

MS. SESAY: I'm glad to hear that there is so much positive feeling about a way through this because it is something that has been troubling me greatly. So I'm really glad to hear Witney and Winnie speak about a way of tackling this vaccine issue for the continent.

I do want to get in some audience questions because people have been kind enough to write in before today. And I want to go with this question from Marie Smitherson from Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church. She asks this question, and I'm going to go to you, Vera, with this, and then after that, anyone, please feel free to jump in. We only have about 19 minutes so, in fact, yes, less than that, 14 minutes, rather. So let's keep the answers brief so we can get in quite a few questions.

Vera, she says, "Since corruption on all levels is so pervasive, how would we guarantee that a loan would be used for its designated use? Many agencies or organizations or individuals would take a cut."

Just this question of transparency and governance.

MS. SONGWE: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Let me answer it in two spaces. The first space is, first of all, we need to get those resources coming to the continent. So as Aloysius said, recapitalization of the multilateral development banks so they can put more resources into the continent and extension of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative. We hope that the new U.S. government is going to take that to the end of the year. The Special Drawing Rights, I think with the new secretary of the Treasury, first female secretary of the Treasury in the United States, we are really looking forward to her approving an increase of \$500 billion of Special Drawing Rights to the IMF that can then go to the countries and to the private sector. How are countries going to ensure, and it goes back to this.

And then finally, the liquidity facility. We do need -- our countries are going back to the market but I think what we are watching in this crisis is the largest transfer of resources from the developing world to the developed world. Essentially, we are borrowing in the markets at 6%, whereas in the West is borrowing at 1%. So we're transferring resources. It is because we are doing that and borrowing so expensively that we must ensure that when the resources come to the continent they're used transparently. And that's why I think this whole ICT process, and maybe the need for the development institutions, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and others, to ask those countries to put the resources out more transparently. Again, you know, there are no magic bullets. We've seen even the United States, the first stimulus bill, you know, people that were not supposed to get it got it. The good news here is that we found out and maybe in some cases we're able to rectify it. So that these mistakes, so that these issues will happen is there but I think what we need again are institutions and systems put in place.

In Kenya, there's somebody called Kenneth O'Day there, and I hope everybody knows him, but he's like one of my biggest, you know, he is down there in the trenches saying if you want me to buy a \$1 mask, tell me what you did with the resources you go. I think President Cyril Ramaphosa is also

saying, you know, let's put in place transparency systems. With technology today we can trace the resources. We can find out who got the mask and who didn't get it. So I think it's really institutions working with civil society, building those partnerships.

But finally, and finally, the developed world, the markets have to be transparent. We cannot follow the money if we don't know where the money came from or who gave us the money. And now that we have varying degrees of funders, you know, bilaterals, China, India, Turkey, we need to know where those resources are going to. We need to know who is getting it on what terms so the transparency of resources that are coming into the continent of those contracts from the private sector, the banking sector, is going to be critical for moving forward. Thank you.

MS. SESAY: Thank you, Vera. Thank you for that.

Aloysius, I want to bring you in here in response to -- and first of all, let me also say thank you to Marie for that question.

Lars Benson from CIPE, thank you, Lars, for writing in. He asks this question, "What do we need to see from the AfCFTA to know whether or not it's working in 2021?"

MR. ORDU: I absolutely believe that our brother, Wamkele Mene, who is already a crier as the head of the AfCFTA already set off on the right footing because the idea of trade liberalization we talked about. We know the limits of it, etc.. But what they are doing from the work get-go is they're now focusing on technological aspects and taking advantage of social media so that people across the continent that are trade registry and many of the electronically-based platforms that they are setting up at the very beginning, and the fruits of many of this will be borne out they see already. Because the idea that somebody, as he put it so eloquently in the paper he drafted for us, you know, a peanut farmer, for example, in Gambia, who people in Lesotho are not even aware of how they can easily access, you know, so using today's modern technology and ensuring that people know what is happening where across the continent, I think that's a starting point and they're doing that very, very well.

And of course, the idea of trade facilitation. I think Vera mentioned it, and in one of the reports she put out recently, it's quite clear that some of the things we need to do on the customs front. They're not rocket science. The World Bank used to publish the Ease of Doing Business, which was a brilliant report because it gave you a chance for the best to come to the surface. Right? And many

African countries were actually making tremendous progress in terms of eliminating some of these barriers, the customs, etc. And (inaudible) regime. So many of these things at the country level and then using technology, I believe in the interim those are absolutely the first things that should happen. And Wamkele Mene is on track to deliver on those initiatives. Thank you.

MS. SESAY: Thank you, Aloysius.

Witney, to you. This question from Graham Genrich. Thank you, Graham. He asked this question, "How will new or future U.S. policies affect security in the region?"

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: Really good question. Let me just start by adding a metric to that last question about when we know AfCFTA will work. It takes about 17 hours for a truck full of supplies to get from Cape Town to Johannesburg. That's about 1,000 miles. Today it takes that same truck to get from Johannesburg to Lusaka, about the same distance, five days. So when we know that that truck can do that Johannesburg to Lusaka route in the same time as Cape Town, I think we'll know AfCFTA is really delivering. And I'm confident we can get there.

On the security question, you know, I think we need a rethink here. There's just no question that, you know, the issues in the Sahel, the issues that you write about, Isha, in Northern Nigeria and those countries, the G5 -- Somalia, Northern Mozambique. I mean, each one, it's a little different, but I think we just need a reset in our dialogue. And it's not just a security issue. It's an economic development issue. What did we see in Mali? That was a lot about corruption and profound dissatisfaction of a corrupt government. You know, people need transparency. People need accountability. People need options from taking what they need by force so they can get it through opportunity. And I don't think those dialogues are happening right now. So personally, I would like to see a reset in our whole security approach.

For instance, in the AGOA relationship, annually there's a U.S.-Africa ministerial with trade ministers. I would like to see that translated into the security sector as well. And to see our new secretary of defense meet with his and her counterparts on the continent to begin dealing with security in a new way and bring the development equation, bring the commercial equation into the equation, bring in the health equation dimension into the equation. And until we get there, I think we're going to be just trying to put out fires as it were until we begin to deal with these security questions holistically.

MS. SESAY: Thank you. Thank you, Witney.

Winnie, this question is from Katano Pang. Katano, thank you for sharing this question.

Katano writes, "The political and military instabilities hinder economic development and eradication of poverty. On the other hand, the causes of these instabilities are associated with the lack of development and poverty. How can these interdependencies be resolved to promote both peace and sustainable economic development?"

MS. BYANYIMA: Thank you, Isha.

Also to add to the points that Witney was -- to the earlier question, I think there was something that the Trump administration did that was in some way helpful to Africa. He, President Trump did not want to use this American leadership of the world. He wanted to look inward and to let other countries manage their own affairs. I think to some extent the Africans have tried to stand in and to resolve our African problems ourselves and we need to move further along that road of resolving the conflicts that are raging -- the security issues on the continent in order to free up our resources and human beings to live and to innovate and to live good lives.

I think that some of the big issues of our continent that we need to solve ourselves are, for example, the asymmetrical conflicts in the Sahel region and also very much growing in Eastern Horn of Africa where you have no frontlines of wars except that you have armed groups, people who arm themselves who are tough, who don't declare a war but who are extremists and creating insecurity. It's a new form of conflict. We don't have the tools to resolve it. They are nonstate actors. We don't have the means to resolve those conflicts. We need to develop those fast and develop our own African tools and resolve those kinds of -- we know how to try to build peace between warring parties, with frontlines, in civil wars, or across border wars, but these new forms of crisis that are plaguing our continent, we have not come to speed and we need to. And we can't look to the Security Council and whoever they are. They are even less able than ourselves to resolve those crises. So we need to pay attention there.

I wanted to say that this virus, this war against a virus has really taught us that investing in our health, in the education of our people is not something you might do but you must first grow the economy. You must first invest in wars. No. This is the real war now. The war now is against a virus. It has found us and are invested in health with broken and weak health systems. And we are grappling

because we've been working on infectious diseases and Ebola and AIDS, but really, the truth is that we've been caught with nothing there, not enough to support ourselves. And I think this is the time for African leaders to understand that investing in our health is also investing in our security. Investing in education of people is also investing in security of our countries.

MS. SESAY: Winnie, thank you. And it is the perfect segue to my final question as we draw to a close with about six minutes till the end of this gathering. And this is a question that I'm going to pose to all of you. So I'm going to open it up, give it to Vera, and then I'd love your take each and every one of you.

This was something that is in this report, the 2021 Edition of Foresight Africa, and it's a question posed by Kasarim Nwuke. He said, "Given the financial constraints, are we at the point where the SDG should be amended, reduced in number so that Africa should be focused on its 2063 Agenda instead?"

And I'd love to hear your thoughts, Vera. Basic point, the financial constraints. They're severe. Trying to achieve these 17 SDGs is a big ask and well out of reach. If it comes to eliminating extreme poverty, already we know that for much of the continent. But where do you stand on the SDGs in this current climate for the continent?

Vera, can you hear me?

MS. SONGWE: Thank you. And thanks for the question for that (phonetic).

Can you hear me?

MS. SESAY: I can now. There was a lag.

MS. SONGWE: Can you hear me?

MS. SESAY: Yes. I can hear you. Can you hear me?

MS. SONGWE: Better.

No, I think, listen, I can hear you.

I think everybody is frozen on my screen. I don't know if you can hear me better.

But the secretary general and the Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed, I think this year, 2020 -- last year, 2020, we launched (inaudible) action for the SDGs. And when COVID hit there was a big question. You know, can we still launch a (inaudible) action? But I think more than ever,

(inaudible) for the SDGs is important. There is no, I think, set of goals that brings the world together as powerfully as the SDGs. We need to continue on the SDGS. And actually, because of COVID, and maybe because of this resilience we talked about on the continent, Africa is maybe actually going to speed ahead faster towards the SDGS.

We are talking now about human capital. We're talking about educating our kids and our girls differently. We're trying to put them onto technology. So I think there's a couple of things that we can do better and do faster because of the crisis. What we need to do is look at how we finance that, and the Economic Commission for Africa just came out with a report on innovative financing for development where we are looking inward as well. Our pension funds. You know, could we do it differently with our pension funds? Can we use Africa's own resources to ensure that?

Now, on the SDA's and Agenda 2063, the Africa we want, the first 10 years of Agenda 2063 respond to the SDGs. So I think it's a false argument to say should we focus on Agenda 2063 and forget the SDGs. They are together. And, you know, the SDGs are an interlinked set of partnerships, of resources, of women, of reducing poverty, of ensuring infrastructure works. It's everything we want to do under the Infrastructure Development Agenda for the African Union. It's everything we want to do under Beijing Plus 25 Global Goals on gender and ensuring gender equality. Silencing the Guns is in the SDGS. As it is in the African Union 2063 Agenda. So no, I think more than ever before what we need is to strengthen those partnerships, to ensure as our secretary general has said, that the African Union and the United Nations come together and work hand in hand to make sure that we meet those goals.

MS. SESAY: Vera, thank you.

I'm just going to go around the house.

Aloysius, final words from you on that question of the SDGs and parting thoughts.

MR. ORDU: Thank you very much. That was a very good observation and question.

Indeed, in fact, in preparing this report, we debated that idea inhouse. And in the end, we basically refer people to the Human Development chapter, chapter three. We ended up basically posing those questions because in our mind, our sister, Amina Mohammed, under-secretary at the United Nations was very clear along the lines that Vera has just articulated which makes eminent sense. At the same time we had one of our brilliant scholars, Kasarim Nwuke, former UNICA, who also articulated when you think of

what has hit us in terms of this black swan, the idea that we will continue with 17 goals and 168 or 169 indicators, whether is this not too much? Is this a time to really now revisit and reprioritize some of these indicators and goals?

I think as Vera mentioned and Amina Mohammed captured very, very well, there is a case clearly to move forward on the goals we have right now. And secondly, to take advantage of the newfound “we” feeling if you like the solidarity that Winnie has really, really emphasized a number of times today because one of the things that has emerged on the continent is this newfound solidarity. At a time when the world is really fractured and globalization is (inaudible) threat. North Africans are really pushing together. Sure, Agenda 2063 remains a long time ago but there is no reason why we couldn’t basically continue to pursue the goals, even if it means that we do not meet all of them because the ability to meet all of them inevitably depends on financing.

This is where the last point in my view, one of the biggest challenges facing our continent right now, I think Winnie touched on this as well, as well as Vera, domestic resource mobilization. If there’s one thing we’ve learned, remittances have hit the floor. Fund direct investments are curtailed. And of course, ODA is under stress. Guess the countries who actually give the ODAs are themselves domestically challenged. So if there is one rising up of Africa it’s this idea of taking advantage of what we’ve just gone through and behave differently, mend our ways. Cut, you know, reduce the leakages in our tax system, modernizing using technology to make sure that revenues come in, and make sure that the rich pay their fair share and companies as well. Domestic resource mobilization. If Africans, all 55 countries could push towards 25% to 30%, I think we’ll have a completely different continent. Thank you very much.

MS. SESAY: A hopeful note there from Aloysius. He’s a hopeful soul here this morning.

I want to go to Witney. Your final thoughts, and on this question of prioritization and where the SDGs fit in.

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: It’s a really important question because there’s no question that the MDGs and the successor SDGs has really helped to create this “we” feeling as Aloysius just animated. But what I find with a number of the companies that we deal with across sectors is that the list is so long. And what they’re beginning to focus on are ESG goals. You know, environment, social, and governance.

So what does that mean? That means companies get it and they understand that, you know, investing in people has to be part of the investment plan. It has to be baked in at the beginning. This isn't some sort of extraneous do-good thing. It's very important to the commercial success and the developmental success of the country.

But I think allowing companies room to sort of show the goals that they're achieving and really, you know, having them embraced and understood by government and civil society is really sort of the next step at building that trust. It's not all that pervasive between the private sector and, you know, many people on the continent. So I think these goals can be a catalyst. I think simplifying is a good thing. And you know, maybe we have another Zoom just dedicated to that subject. I don't know. But, you know, it's really quite important that we see that the private sector investment, job creation, is really part of -- an integral part of the economic development paradigm addressing inequality, addressing poverty, and most importantly, addressing the COVID crisis that we're all facing.

MS. SESAY: Thank you so much for that, Witney. I agree. I think another Zoom gathering may be in order to tackle that question.

Final words, closing words for this session from Winnie. Winnie, what do you think of this question and priorities as we move ahead when it comes to the SDGs?

MS. BYANYIMA: Sure. Everything we have -- the SDGs are not a packet of technical projects that we are going to do and end poverty and achieve prosperity. They're a political agenda. And this political agenda can only be realized if we empower African people. Whether it is fighting this epidemic and beating it, this pandemic, we must empower people in their communities to take charge and to prevent and to fight it and to win against it. Whether it's about building jobs, building young people's entrepreneurship, women's entrepreneurship, it's still about giving them their power and their voice to go out there and do it for themselves. So it all hinges on what Vera was talking about, the governance issue. The empowerment of people to be free, to have a voice, to do what they want, and to ask their leaders, demand from their leaders for their priorities. So whatever we do must be empowering people. That is how Africa will win.

MS. SESAY: Nicely said, Winnie.

I think that this has been an illuminating session. We see the datapoints and we

understand the economic toll and the battle Africa's leaders are fighting right now just to keep things afloat. But hearing each and every one of you speak about this newly tapped into resilience. Because Africa, we've always been resilient, but you know, this kind of new kind of embracing of it and this coming together, this "we" that is forming a kind of (inaudible) against the many problems that the continent is facing I think is incredibly inspiring. And I hope everybody who has joined us this morning feels that same way. There are many challenges ahead. There's no doubt about that. And no one can sugarcoat those. But, you know, Vera, you've really tapped into, you know, this is a different moment and this crisis does present an opportunity, one which leaders are leaning into. So I look forward to part two of this conversation as we take stock of how well they've done through 2021.

And for today, this is where we must leave it. I want to thank the Brookings Institute and Africa Growth Initiative for inviting me to be part of this. Aloysius, the new director of AGI, congratulations. And thank you for having me. Thank you to each and every one of you -- Witney Schneidman, Vera Songwe, Winnie Byanyima -- thank you so much for giving up your time to be part of this illuminating conversation, a critically needed one. Thank you to each and every one of you.

To all of you watching from wherever you are around the world, thank you for giving up your time and please be safe. Hope to see you back here soon. Bye for now.

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