**Africa post COVID-19**

2020 rattled the world and its’ implications are and will shape our future in every possible aspect: politically, economically and most important, socially. Every national economy was severely hit in various ways, however, for Africa, the pandemic’s effect is by far deeper and unfortunately, the aftermath might paint the continent’s future in gloomy colors.

COVID-19 arrived to Africa only in February-March 2020. Most governments reacted swiftly, introducing lockdowns and strict measures and somewhat prevailed, at least comparing to the first months in Europe or the USA. One of the most important features of Africa’s response to [Covid-19](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23Covid19&src=hash) has been the strong regional institutions. The Africa CDC stepped in, providing much-needed health policy leadership. However, even if the close cooperation within the African Union, Africa CDC and the continents’ regional organizations, helped in curbing the pandemic, with a little over 4 million people infected and almost 110,000 fatalities, the overall effect is overwhelming. That is due to the initial cut off from world economy, which didn’t return to normalcy yet, lack of access, interrupted connectivity, the economies sustained a deep blow.

Throughout the 2000s, journalists used to praise the African growth’ pace and write that 7 out of 10 of the fastest-growing economies in the world are in Africa, but in 2020 we see, the African continent is entering a recession for the first time in 25 years, with a negative 3.3 percent growth rate. Some countries have it worse than the others: the implications of the pandemic multiplied the effects of the steep drop in oil prices, for the oil producing economis in Africa – Nigeria, Angola, Ghana and more.

Climate change keep presenting major challenges to Africa. The pandemic diverted both attention and funds away from this significant phenomenon, which effects are felt in almost every aspect - politically, socially and economically, in the continent. Urbanization, an ongoing process, linked also to climate change – lack of food security, emerging conflicts and so on, presents another link in the pandemic chain: the virus has spread primarily in the region’s [cities](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=ZG), home to 40 percent of the population. In the same way, the pandemic severely interrupted children’s education and took many of them outside of the schools, with a wider implication to girls, an unfortunate phenomenon which effects will be felt in the future, deepening gaps and disparity.

As Judd Devermond, of CSIS, in Washington, recently wrote: “Sub-Saharan Africa is entering a recession for the first time in 25 years. The disruption to trade and tourism, suspension of investments, and impact of lockdowns and other restrictions have sent the region’s economies into a tailspin. According to the World Bank, Covid-19 could push up to 40 million people into extreme poverty”.

I agree - Even if some countries, like Nigeria, seem to present a slighty more positive trend in recent months, the debt crisis overshadows most of the continent. Many countries are in dire need for vast investments, not just handouts: these antagonizes the public sentiment, in Africa, the public which would like to see a different path: dealing with the root problems, encouraging structural reforms and creating a better future for younger generations.

Those, the young, present a keen interest as well as impressive involvement in bridging the gaps through education and the creation of vibrant eco systems, aspiring for innovation, as a key for advancing both their personal goals as well as the national economy. Israel, which enjoys a leading role in global innovation, is very involved , via MASHAV, in promoting innovation in Africa (as presented in my keynote speech yesterday), working with governments, NGO’s and the business sector, assisting in creating the platforms for prolific ecosystems. The time is right, for Africa and for foreign investors: for example, Fintech is by far the fastest growing sector in African venture capitalism. The pandemic accelerated major innovative breakthroughs, including in talent marketplace businesses, pay-as-you-go platforms and so on. With all the downsides of the pandemic, [COVID19](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19?src=hashtag_click) caused unprecedented digital acceleration, which brings the world, and Africa, to a different stage.

The pandemic crippled and limited, in many cases, governments’ ability to deter and fight violent extremist groups, which in many places, took advantage of the government’s occupation with the pandemic to pose a growing threat – some of them actually offered local solutions (in Somalia, health workers were kidnaped by al Shabab to provide services for the terror group’s held area). Violence results in displacement of millions, which in turn, exacerbates the burden of governments and communities and creates challenges to community resilience, traditional way of life, not to mention wider implications regarding COVID-19 response. According to the UNHCR, internal displacement in the Sahel alone has quadrupled within the past two years, from 500,000 to 2 million people.

Last but not least, one cannot over emphasize the need to get vaccines to Africa. At this point, most countries have a very limited, if at all, access to the vaccine and for many, there will be none, before 2022 or 2023. As of March, Ghana was the first country to receive 600,000 AstraZeneca vaccines via WHO COVAX, Kenya received 1 million+ doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, while Rwanda became the first country in Africa to secure Pfizer shots. Ethiopia and Rwanda received first deliveries and so on, but we are very far from the goal. “Vaccine diplomacy” is emerging as a new political tool, which becomes another factor in the new political reality. It creates crises of expectations, which could be translated to enduring threats.

When thinking of economic solutions and the way forward, we should prefer a more holistic approach, based on partnerships, national and multilateral, involve the private sector and the NGO’s, working with the African nations. The potential is substantive, for all parties involved, for development, business and trade. For example, the newly constructed AfcFTA has the potential to unite a market of more than 1.2 billion people and would have a combined GDP of more than $3.4 trillion, which would be the fifth-largest economy in the world.

To sum it up: Post Covid-19 world: growing needs and dwindling resources, faced with pressing challenges, not only COVID-19, but the ongoing struggle with natural disasters – locust, droughts, floods, as well as poverty. These should be better encountered by multiplied partnerships, national and international, combining means and capabilities of governments, UN agencies and NGOs. The new reality in Africa will be reflected in new alliances, re-shaping of foreign involvement, a different power game, or ”great game”. It is all about partnerships, adaptation to the new era, working together in this new world of uncertainty. That is the only way forward, Thank you.

