

“We need to build a different Africa”



Mo Ibrahim
FOUNDATION

2021 Ibrahim Governance Weekend concludes with rallying call from Mo Ibrahim: use pandemic response to build a more self-reliant Africa

London, 8 June 2021 – Discussing the impact of COVID-19 on Africa, the 2021 Ibrahim Governance Weekend (IGW) heard that Africa has demonstrated strong and coordinated leadership in response to the pandemic, and the continent can now leverage the recovery from the crisis to build lasting change for generations to come.

Held in a virtual format for the first time, the IGW brought together prominent voices from across Africa and beyond, including 100 members of the Now Generation Forum, a network of young African leaders from over 40 countries. Discussions were informed by the Foundation’s latest research: *COVID-19 in Africa one year on: impact and prospects*, a comprehensive analysis of how the pandemic has impacted health, politics, society and economics in Africa.

Across the three days, contributors called for urgent action to ensure that Africa is vaccinated as soon as possible, and outlined the opportunities ahead for a sustainable, African-led recovery. Concluding the event, **Mo Ibrahim, Founder and Chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation**, said: “Crises are useful in understanding what doesn’t work and how we need to change. We cannot continue to rely on old paradigms and empty commitments. We need to build a different Africa. We need to move forward and be self-reliant, leveraging the integration of our continent and the full potential of our youth.”



Mo Ibrahim speaking to panellists during the virtual 2021 Ibrahim Governance Weekend

The first session of the Ibrahim Forum - *Lessons from the pandemic: an urgent call to strengthen Africa's health capacities* – explored the impact of COVID-19 on health systems, access to vaccines, and how African nations can address the critical issue of inadequate basic healthcare capacity.

Delivering the keynote address, **Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization**, said: "The pandemic has underlined why it's so important to invest in Universal Health Coverage, based on primary healthcare and strong community engagement. How can we take on a new and deadly virus if we cannot provide care for basics like maternal healthcare and the treatment of diabetes? Global health security begins in our local clinics and health systems."

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Co-Chair, The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, said: "How can we prevent it from happening it again? First, we must stop transmission of the current virus. This requires immediate action such as vaccine redistribution, provided in an equitable manner, worldwide. Second, we need to transform the international system of pandemic preparedness and response."

Addressing the issue of vaccine inequity, **Dr John Nkengasong, Director, Africa CDC**, said: "I have a message for the leadership of the G7, which is meeting very shortly. We need vaccines now and we need them quickly on the continent. Anyone who has excess doses of vaccines, the time is now to redistribute those doses so that we can vaccinate our people at speed and at scale. If we don't do that, Africa will definitely move towards the endemicity of this virus on the continent, and that doesn't bode well for our collective global health security."

Prof. Peter Piot, Director, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said: "The top priority now is to ensure global vaccine equity. This is not only a moral imperative, but also critical for pandemic control everywhere."

Highlighting the opportunity to boost Africa's homegrown manufacturing capacity, **Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General, World Trade Organization**, said: "Investing in longer-term production capacity is very important. 80% of vaccine exports come from 10 countries, in North America, Europe and South Asia. We've seen that that concentration does not work. It is anomalous that a continent like Africa, with 1.3 billion people, imports 99% of its vaccines and 90% of its pharmaceuticals. Production of vaccines and pharmaceuticals ought to be better decentralised."

Prof Agnes Binagwaho, Vice Chair, Africa Europe Foundation Health Strategy Group, said: "We should trust in the capacity of Africa to innovate and contribute to the solution. Especially now, we should support the African leaders who are struggling to create in Africa the capacity to manufacture vaccines, drugs and medical tools, to stop this pandemic but also to help the continent be ready for the next one."

Reeta Roy, CEO, Mastercard Foundation, said: "The pandemic is a crisis and an emergency, but it is more than just a public health emergency. It also taps right into some of the underlying economic risks and opportunities here on the continent."

Gayle Smith, Coordinator for Global COVID-19 response and Health Security, US State Department, said: "The US is looking at investment in local manufacturing both in the short-term – in some places injections of capital could increase production very quickly – but also in the long-term. The latter is important because Africa has a disproportionate dependence on vaccines produced outside the continent."

Representing the Now Generation Forum, **Mandipa Ndlovu, PhD candidate, Leiden University**, said: "We really need to push not just for intergenerational conversation, but intergenerational cooperation. There are young people on the ground doing things that people at the top, who have seats at the table, are talking about, but there is just no communication and cooperation."

Speaking during his *one-to-one conversation with Mo Ibrahim*, **Charles Michel, President, European Council**, said: "We need a global approach in order to address global challenges. This is my personal approach and it's also the DNA of the European project... Even if sometimes it's difficult, and sometimes there are frustrations, the multilateral approach is the best tool we have in our hands in order to make progress together."

In the second session - *Managing the fallout: setbacks in democracy and rights, and new triggers of instability* – panellists discussed how COVID-19 has impacted the political and social landscape across Africa, with setbacks to recent progress in education and gender equality, and is exacerbating social unrest.

Delivering the keynote address, **Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations**, said: “The pandemic has reversed many of the development gains we have witnessed in recent years and made our task of achieving the SDGs by 2030 even more difficult. For the first time in two decades, we are seeing a rise in extreme poverty. Many informal workers in Africa, the majority of whom are women, have lost their jobs or experienced a dramatic loss of earnings. School closures and digital divides are jeopardising hard-fought gains in learning. While progress towards gender equality might be pushed back a generation.”

Laurence Chandy, Director of Global Insight and Policy, UNICEF, said: “Of all the least visible effects of the crisis, those on learning come near the top. Although it is relatively easy to observe the number of kids who aren’t going to school, or the number of schools that have shut their doors, it’s much harder to quantify how far children are falling behind on their learning.”

Comfort Ero, Africa Programme Director, International Crisis Group, said: “You can use whatever language you want, but it all boils down to governance. The generation of today doesn’t want to go backwards, doesn’t want a continuation of the past, but is demanding change, and we’re going to see more protest by youth across the board.”

Reflecting on the impact of COVID-19 on democratic processes, **Elhadj As Sy, Chair, Kofi Annan Foundation**, said: “The paradox is, on the one hand, one will say that democracy is important and we should still move ahead and uphold elections in times of COVID-19. But at the same time, governments are restricting people from gathering, blaming COVID-19. We need to prepare for shocks and hazards, to respond to them and to create an enabling environment for the democratic process to happen, while protecting people at the same time.”

Patrick Youssef, Africa Director, International Committee of the Red Cross, said: “The pandemic has been devastating for areas affected by conflicts and violence, and where healthcare systems are weak. But we can all agree that, beyond the predicted fatalities directed from COVID-19, we are all concerned about the knock-on effects, the secondary reverberating impacts on people’s welfare and security at large.”

Representing the Now Generation Forum, **Abiy Shimelis, Co-founder, Addis Sustainable Life**, said: “As a young person, I feel let down... Young people are changing how we express frustrations and aspirations. We are not waiting for elections, we do it constantly through social media, protests, and civic activism. Young people try to have healthier ways to express frustration, but they need to feel they are being heard.”

The final session – *Looking ahead: a key opportunity to reinvent Africa’s growth model* – looked at the opportunity to create more resilient, sustainable and self-sufficient economies, in response to the pandemic laying bare stark vulnerabilities in Africa’s growth model.

Delivering the keynote address, **Dr Donald Kaberuka, Special Envoy on COVID-19, African Union**, said: “Africa’s demographic momentum is unstoppable. For a long time in the years to come, there will be more African doctors, more African engineers, more African farmers, more African economic actors than from elsewhere in the world. We have to figure out how, within the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, we provide opportunities for our young people.”

Representing Dr Ibrahim Mayaki, CEO, AUDA-NEPAD, Hamady Diop, said: “At the regional level one of the challenges that we have is the issue of coordination. You may have different programmes that seem consistent and coherent at the national level, but when you put them together, they are misaligned.”

Highlighting the importance of investment for Africa’s economic recovery, **Dr Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**, said: “Governments need to continue, where possible, on the path of reform of the business sector, to ensure that we can attract more investment. And not just external investment, there is a lot of African investment that can go around.”

Rosa Whitaker, President and CEO, Whitaker Group, said: "This pandemic illustrates how profoundly dependent Africa is on the choices, the blunders, the actions, and even sometimes the self-interest, of others. So, as we look for a post-pandemic recovery, we should look to dismantle Africa's dependency on western countries. One thing we could start with is vaccine dependency."

Sandra Kramer, Africa Director, European Commission, said: "The donor-recipient thinking is behind us. What we are talking about here are equal partnerships, with responsibilities on both sides of the equation. We see partnerships as something that is to do with our policy priorities and interests, but obviously also with the interests and policy priorities of our African partners."

Representing the Now Generation Forum, **Ma Soukha Ba, Private sector development specialist**, said: "All the challenges Africa is facing are business opportunities for the youth. We are trying to solve each challenge, one at a time. But the problem is, we are facing multiple constraints."

During the IGW, **H.E. Mahamadou Issoufou, Former President of Niger**, was honoured as the recipient of the 2020 Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in Africa Leadership. Speaking during his one-to-one conversation with Mo Ibrahim at the conclusion of the weekend, **President Issoufou** said: "I am passionate about African integration and I can see that this is a passion that you, Mo, also share. We will work hand in hand to bring about the Africa we want: a prosperous Africa, a united Africa, a peaceful Africa, and an Africa managed by our children."

Notes to editors

Download IGW materials below:

IBRAHIM FORUM REPORT

- Full report: [English](#)
- Key findings: [English](#)
- Key findings: [French](#)

DAY 1 VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

- Mo Ibrahim's opening remarks: [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Arabic](#)
- Forum Session 1: Lessons from the pandemic: [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Arabic](#)
- 2021 Leadership Ceremony: [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Arabic](#)

DAY 2 VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

- Forum Session 2: Managing the fallout: [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Arabic](#)
- Mo Ibrahim in conversation with Charles Michel, President of the European Council: [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Arabic](#)

DAY 3 VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

- Mo Ibrahim in conversation with Mahamadou Issoufou, Former President of Niger, 2020 Ibrahim Prize Laureate: [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Arabic](#)
- Forum Session 3: Looking ahead: [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Arabic](#)
- Mo's concluding remarks: [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Arabic](#)

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About the Mo Ibrahim Foundation

The Mo Ibrahim Foundation was established in 2006 with a focus on the critical importance of political leadership and public governance in Africa. By providing tools to support progress in leadership and governance, the Foundation aims to promote meaningful change on the continent.

The Foundation, which is a non-grant making organisation, focuses on defining, assessing and enhancing governance and leadership in Africa through five main initiatives:

- Ibrahim Index of African Governance
- Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership
- Ibrahim Governance Weekend
- Ibrahim Fellowships and Scholarships
- Now Generation Network