Third African Transformation Forum

ATF2021 REPORT

INTEGRATING TO TRANSFORM
CONTENTS

Opening Remarks: ‘A Unique Moment’ .............................................................................................................. 3
  ▪ Dr. K.Y. Amoako, ACET President & Founder
  ▪ Hon. Tito Mboweni, South Africa Finance Minister & ACET Board Chair

Keynote Address: Unlocking New Opportunities ......................................................................................... 4
  ▪ H.E. Mahamudu Bawumia, Vice President of the Republic of Ghana

African Transformation Report Launch ........................................................................................................... 5
  ▪ Prof. John Asafu-Adjaye, ACET Senior Fellow

Integrating to Transform: A TLP Panel Discussion ...................................................................................... 6

Leadership at All Levels: A Collaborative Dialogue ...................................................................................... 10

Emerging Leaders Spotlight .......................................................................................................................... 13

Closing Remarks: ‘We Are All Leaders’ ........................................................................................................ 15
  ▪ Ms. Mavis Owusu-Gyamfi, ACET Executive Vice President

The full virtual ATF is available to view online at www.acetforafrica.org/atf

WATCH THE FULL ATF
The African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET) convened the third African Transformation Forum (ATF2021) as a virtual event on July 15, 2021. The forum provided a platform for an array of participants in government, business, academia, and civil society to discuss the ways that African countries—and all development stakeholders—can better collaborate to remove barriers to progress and address national priorities through regional solutions. More than 600 people in 47 countries participated across a variety of platforms, including YouTube, Facebook Live, Twitter, and the ACET website.

ATF2021 featured the launch of the latest edition of ACET’s flagship African Transformation Report. Titled *Integrating to Transform*, the report explores the critical need for African countries to work together beyond trade to tackle shared challenges, harness regional opportunities, and enable economies to scale—and in turn, accelerate Africa’s economic transformation. *Integrating to Transform* is available to read and download on the ACET website. ([www.acetforafrica.org/atr](http://www.acetforafrica.org/atr)).

Dr. K.Y. Amoako, ACET President and Founder, and Hon. Tito Mboweni, South Africa Finance Minister and ACET Board Chair, offered opening remarks and welcomed participants. Dr. Amoako previewed the agenda and thanked special guests. Both he and Mr. Mboweni acknowledged the difficult situation in Africa as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite serious challenges and economic uncertainties, Dr. Amoako said, Africa is in “a unique moment” for improved collaboration to lead to improved outcomes.

H.E. Mahamudu Bawumia, Vice President of the Republic of Ghana, delivered the keynote address by underscoring the importance of the forum’s theme. Opportunities to accelerate Africa’s transformation in areas such as digitalization “can only be unlocked completely through integration and collaboration on shared challenges,” he said. He emphasize the importance of leadership and promised that Ghana, as host of the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat, will do its part for increased collaboration and integration.

The first group discussion featured members of the Transformation Leadership Panel (TLP) elaborating on the themes and issues analyzed in the 2021 African Transformation Report, *Integrating to Transform*, including job creation and skills training, climate risks, technology and innovation, and gender equality. ACET established the TLP in 2019 as a body of development experts to influence, support, and advise leaders on necessary actions to achieve transformative change in Africa. TLP Chairperson H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former president of Liberia, joined the discussion, along with five other panel members.

The second group discussion featured a diverse set of panelists from the public and private sector—including Hon. Souleymane Diarrassouba, Côte d’Ivoire Minister of Trade and Industry—commenting on various aspects of leadership that’s needed for improved African collaboration, both in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19 and to ensure long-term development success.

To further illustrate the potential economic power of integrating to transform, as well as the need for leadership across all levels of society, ATF2021 featured a selection of video profiles of emerging leaders in African civil society and the private sector. In each instance, the invited guest offered a short description of his or her enterprise or endeavor, and the ways in which an integrated Africa could yield even greater results.
Ms. Owusu-Gyamfi, ACET Executive Vice President, gave closing remarks and thanked all viewers and participants. She reviewed key points that emerged as common themes, including the urgency of leadership across the board. “We are all leaders,” she said, “and we must drive and own this agenda. We need to work together to transform Africa.” She also announced ACET will keep the ATF2021 conversation going with a series of webinars focused on the issues featured in Integrating to Transform, including jobs, innovation, and climate.

The African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET) is a pan-African economic policy institute that supports governments and businesses to transform economies and deliver sustainable growth that improves livelihoods. ACET follows a unique approach that combines analysis, advice, and advocacy in critical program areas, encompassing economic management and governance, youth employment and skills, regional integration private sector development, and gender equality, to foster collaboration and partnerships among policy makers and the private sector as they look to accelerate Africa’s sustainable growth.
Dr. K.Y. Amoako

ACET President & Founder

Dr. Amoako officially opened the 2021 African Transformation Forum with a welcome to all viewers and participants on behalf of ACET. “I am delighted that technology enables us to still come together, from all corners of the world,” he said, acknowledging the shift to a virtual event in response to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Amoako previewed the forum’s agenda, including the launch of the third African Transformation Report, titled Integrating to Transform. He said both the report and the planned ATF discussions shared a singular focus: “Africa’s future, and what it will take to ensure sustainable growth and transformation—not just in the aftermath of COVID-19, but over the long haul.”

Despite serious challenges and economic uncertainties, Africa is in “a unique moment” for improved collaboration to lead to improved outcomes, he said. “The African Continental Free Trade Area has also come into effect this year, and it offers a pathway for countries to advance integration beyond trade and markets. Pressing Pan-African issues—such as jobs and education, digital connectivity, climate change, infrastructure and energy—need to be addressed in a collaborative way, not just by countries working in isolation.”

Dr. Amoako thanked the guests who would be joining for the ATF’s two panel discussions and offered a special note of appreciation to Ghana Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia for delivering the keynote address. “I trust everyone will find the forum rich, rewarding, and motivating,” he concluded.

Hon. Tito Mboweni

South Africa Finance Minister & ACET Board Chair

Referring to his association with ACET as a “most wonderful” experience, Mr. Mboweni recognized the organization’s leadership team for its “steady hand” in navigating the sudden challenges brought on by the pandemic. And he specifically commended ACET’s partners and “friends from the around the world” for their continued engagement. “We thank all our friends who have always stood by us [to] provide support for the transformation of Africa,” he said.

Mr. Mboweni spoke passionately about the “very difficult COVID-19 situation” in Africa and the need for more autonomy over the production and distribution of vaccines. He also thanked continental agencies, such as the African CDC and African Development Bank, for their roles in the collaborative fight against the virus.

In closing, Mr. Mboweni, who delivered opening remarks at the previous ATF in 2018 as well, said that he wanted to “assure those who are joining us for the first time” of the unique nature of the ATF. The forum, he said, “offers one of the most useful, innovative, and insightful occasions” to exchange ideas and policy approaches for transformation strategies. “Thank you,” he concluded, “for walking with us on this journey.”

WATCH THIS SESSION

The full virtual ATF is available to view online at www.acetforafrica.org/atf
H.E. MAHAMUDU BAWUMIA

Vice President of the Republic of Ghana

Just as he did at the previous African Transformation Forum in 2018, which was held in Accra in partnership with the Government of Ghana, Vice President Bawumia delivered the event’s keynote address. He offered support for ACET—calling the organization a “standard-bearer of economic transformation discourse” and commending its “strong and impressive track record” for convening policymakers—and underscored the importance of the forum’s theme.

“The COVID crisis has made the urgency and importance of collaboration very clear,” he said. “It has held back transformation across Africa, but also provided opportunities for acceleration in areas such as digitalization. These can only be unlocked completely through integration and collaboration on shared challenges.”

Vice President Bawumia noted that Ghana was among the first countries to sign and ratify the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement, which offers a pathway for improved integration.

“The AfCFTA exemplifies the Pan-African approach,” he said. “Without a doubt, it has the potential to be a game-changer for post-COVID recovery and transformation if we can harness its numerous benefits. The scale and scope of these benefits depend on overcoming inadequate infrastructure, inadequate production capacity, and faster market integration.”

The vice president said that Ghana, which was selected as the permanent host of the AfCFTA secretariat, has kept transformation at the center of many of its core policies for education, industrialization, agriculture, and technology, which he discussed in more detail.

The “success of Ghana’s digital transformation journey” has become increasingly evident, he said, from the use of drone technology to deliver medical supplies to the issuance of biometric national ID cards to expand Ghana’s tax base. He said Ghana’s financial inclusion has also improved through mobile money interoperability, which has increased the proportion of the adult population with access to banking services from 30 percent to 90 percent.

“These are major reforms for the transformation agenda,” he said. “And when it comes to regional collaboration and integration, digital innovations will play a crucial role in the implementation of the AfCFTA and countries’ abilities to seize on the opportunities.”

Integrating to transform will take dedicated leadership, Vice President Bawumia said in conclusion, and he promised that Ghana, as host of the AfCFTA secretariat, will do its part for increased collaboration and integration—and to support ACET’s call on leaders “to promote visions and take actions for the broader common good, beyond our borders. I look forward to learning from leaders at all levels and finding new ways to collaborate.”

The full virtual ATF is available to view online at www.acetforafrica.org/atf
Saying that he was “very excited about what this report has to offer,” Prof. Asafu-Adjaye officially unveiled the third edition of ACET’s flagship African Transformation Report (ATR). Titled Integrating to Transform, the report explores the critical need for African countries to work together to tackle shared challenges, harness regional opportunities, and enable economies to scale—and in turn, accelerate Africa’s economic transformation. Prof. Asafu-Adjaye offered a brief description of the report’s main themes and recommendations ahead of an ATR video presentation.

“African countries have recorded some good growth over the past two decades, but they have made slow progress in actually transforming their economies,” he said. “This is because they have been working in isolation.”

According to the report, African countries should use the political momentum of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which came into effect in January, as a catalyst to advance regional integration efforts beyond trade and markets by increasing collaboration in other policy areas. In doing so, Prof. Asafu-Adjaye said, countries can better “address long-term economic challenges that constrain Africa’s development.”

Integrating to Transform focuses on three of those challenges in particular: ensuring productive employment for Africa’s young work force through skills development; supporting digital innovation, especially within the private sector; and managing climate risks to turn risks into opportunities.

“Africa’s growing youth population presents an opportunity to reap a demographic dividend to boost economic growth,” Prof. Asafu-Adjaye said in describing the context for the report’s research and its findings. Meanwhile, he added, “digital technologies have already transformed many aspects of our lives. With the right policies, they can be leveraged to transform entire economies.”

On climate, he noted that even though most African countries “are already experiencing climate-related stresses,” they can combine smart policy and technology to reduce impacts and spur growth in key sectors such as agriculture, ecosystems, and energy.

“ Achieving all these outcomes will require African countries to collaborate,” Prof. Asafu-Adjaye said. Indeed, Integrating to Transform argues that greater regional collaboration – especially through the delivery of regional public goods like transport corridors and digital connectivity—will help remove barriers that have slowed progress in the past. And it will be key to working across borders to address critical issues—such as jobs, technology, and climate – that pose national problems but require regional solutions.

Integrating to Transform is available for download on the ACET website. (www.acetforafrica.org/atr)
The first group discussion of ATF2021 featured members of the Transformation Leadership Panel (TLP) elaborating on the themes and issues analyzed in the 2021 African Transformation Report, Integrating to Transform. The TLP is a body of development experts from the public and private sectors, both in Africa and around the world, chaired by H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. ACET established the TLP in 2019, following the previous year’s African Transformation Forum, to influence, support, and advise leaders on critical and necessary actions to achieve transformative change in Africa. BBC News presenter and reporter Nancy Kacungira moderated the discussion.

She felt the international response toward Africa had been mixed; too slow in terms of meeting commitments—particularly on the reallocation of vaccines—but better in terms of facilitating development and support for the expansion of production in the global South. She also commended countries that called for special drawing rights (SDR) reallocation, and noted that several partnership countries had demonstrated a strong commitment to Africa. Nevertheless, she added, African countries had to make particular efforts not to depend on official development assistance for budget support.

“What path is Africa to follow at this crossroads?” Madame Johnson Sirleaf asked. She said the choice was between continuing with the status quo, trying to be strong advocates for the continuation of support, or “moving towards more self-reliance through regional cooperation and integration.”

The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) provides an immediate opportunity to start that process, she said, and many African countries have performed so well that they may be on the path to self-reliance. “But how do we pull all the others into an integrative whole?” These are questions for African leaders to address—nationally, regionally and continentally, she concluded.

“Africa is at a crossroads,” Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stated in her opening presentation. The pandemic hit at a time when multilateral, global and collective action was under threat due to nationalism, isolationism, and exclusion, she said, while also exposing deep-seated inequities and injustices, with “disastrous effects” on economies.

PANELISTS

- **Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**, former President of Liberia; TLP Chairperson
- **Dolika Banda**, independent development consultant
- **Hafez Ghanem**, World Bank Regional Vice President, Eastern and Southern Africa
- **Ibrahim Mayaki**, CEO, African Union Development Agency–NEPAD (AUDU-NEPAD)
- **Reeta Roy**, President and CEO, Mastercard Foundation
- **Vera Songwe**, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

The full virtual ATF is available to view online at www.acetforafrica.org/atf
Aggravated by COVID-19, Africa’s old norms have been exposed as inadequate. What are the policies and decisions to take at this crossroads to promote innovation?

“Innovation and integration in Africa are mutually reinforcing,” said World Bank Regional Vice President Hafez Ghanem, adding his strong belief that Africa has to leapfrog, especially in the digital area. “A reasonable and achievable objective is to have universal access to internet in Africa by the end of this decade. This also means access to electricity and energy.”

Mr. Ghanem said the pandemic has reinforced how crucial innovation and digital resources are to survival and progress. Mobile money, for example, has been very important for financial inclusion for millions who previously had no access to financial services. Similarly, digital IDs, e-governance and better revenue collection are among the many ways innovation can help.

“We need to invest much more in the infrastructure for connectivity,” he said. “We need to develop our regulatory framework to encourage investment in innovation and technology, to encourage competition, and to [lower costs]. We also need to invest in skills. And of course we need to develop regional markets. There is no reason for not moving towards a single digital market in Africa.”

How can a regional approach help Africa move towards development with sustainability?

Independent development consultant Dolika Banda said Africans are “very aware” of the local and global challenges facing them today, but too often have not effectively worked together to tackle those challenges. For example, she said, climate is among the key questions, and “I think we have underestimated the cost of not managing the risk,” she said. “It is about adaptation and … building resilience, particularly among youth and women. If we do not build resilience among those populations, then we reverse all the gains we have made.”

According to Ms. Banda, the role of think tanks such as ACET, advocacy bodies such as the TLP, and international partners such as the Mastercard Foundation is to help build resilience and to use current circumstances as a risk management opportunity. “Technology is on our side,” she said. “Renewable energy is on our side.”

On climate in particular, she noted that certain sustainability challenges—such as the ability to deliver energy and feed people—must be addressed by integrating and collaborating at the regional level, in addition to local and national initiatives, for “much bigger and stronger markets and opportunities.”

Only about 100 million of the 450 million Africans reaching working age by 2035 can expect to find a decent, well-paid job. The statistics suggest we have a long way to go. What gives us hope that we can change this trajectory?

Mastercard Foundation President and CEO Reeta Roy explained how her organization asked more than 3,000 African youth in multiple countries what “dignified” and “fulfilling” work meant to them. “Young people’s views influence how we engage with people in industry and the private sector who help to drive growth in agriculture, hospitality, manufacturing, and so on,” she said.

Ms. Roy said they found certain attributes to be consistent in those views—such as work that is honest, reputable and satisfying, and provides enough income to care for families, save, and plan for the future. But, she added, “what is common across countries is digitalization.”

With the advent of the AfCFTA, she said, digitalization opens up new opportunities for Africa’s youth. “In all the sectors, they’re going to need digital literacy and digital skills as well as the soft skills that employers require, such as communication and [problem-solving]. That means we as a society need to be much more open about thinking in different ways about education.”

Ms. Roy said the Mastercard Foundation also promotes entrepreneurship, noting that there are more than 500 hubs across Africa supporting young people with ideas at various stages of their enterprise. “Many of their business ideas involve some aspect of digital backbone,” she said, “so equipping them, supporting them, accompanying them—not just with finance but also access to markets—will be critical.”
MODERATOR: With regard to connectedness, markets and regional integration, what [do we know] about Africa today?

"We have a two-speed process going on," said AUDA-NEPAD Chief Executive Officer Ibrahim Mayaki. "At the institutional level, we have the African Union Commission, AUDA-NEPAD, regional economic communities, and so on. The less visible level involves, for example, Nigerian entrepreneurs going to Kenya and Kenyan lawyers going to Rwanda. This level is much faster than the first."

The AU is not a supra-national organization, Dr. Mayaki added—countries can implement decisions if they want but they are not obliged to, like in the European Union. Therefore, the question is how to reconcile these two systems?

"We need the institutional level," he said. "Agriculture ministers, for example, have to work out a common position to defend Africa's interests. But this level is slow. How can we make it faster and interact better with the faster process?"

According to Dr. Mayaki, the answer is leadership: "Leaders who understand the need to create the necessary ecosystem for the two-speed process are the ones who are in fact propelling Africa forward."

MODERATOR: The African Continental Free Trade Area is a major step forward. How much further does Africa have to go beyond trade to arrive at integration that really transforms the continent?

ECA Executive Secretary Vera Songwe illustrated the benefits of integration and transformation by using the example of Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) refining the metallic ore columbite-tantalite, known as coltan for short.

"DRC has about 80% of the world’s coltan," she began. "The mining part of the coltan value chain is $11 billion, and the first bit of processing—basically cleaning the stone and putting it on a ship—takes you to $44 billion. Then the extraction of precursors, niobium and tantalum, is a $271 billion market. We could get platinum from South Africa, lithium from Zimbabwe, and manufacture precursors in DRC. Even a fraction of that market, she said, 15 or 20 percent, would more than double DRC’s current $50 billion GDP in three years.

"We’re not just talking about it," Ms. Songwe said, adding that she had met recently with DRC President Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, also the current chair of the African Union, to discuss these figures and how to create 16 million new jobs. "All we need today is to create an environment that brings the fabrication onto the continent," she said. "We don’t even need foreign investment in this case. The DRC private sector said, ‘we can do this’." Giving another example of progress through the AfCFTA, Ms. Songwe described an ICT camp that the ECA had run for 8,000 young women from across the continent. "These women in different countries were immediately collaborating on projects," she said. "Integration through the AfCFTA isn’t just about hardware, but also software—the people and developing their skills."

Ms. Songwe also raised a note of caution, saying that Africa had entered a period of what she called “dynamic divergence” and warning against “even more inequality on our continent.” With ICT, for example, "those who have access can train with online courses, and we can get robotics engineers. But there is another significant proportion without access. We need to ensure that connectivity.”

MODERATOR: What is your response to the growing gaps in gender and other inequalities as we go forward as a continent?

"The processes have started for changes in constitutions, laws, and policies that promote equity," said Madame Johnson Sirleaf. "Women’s groups are working to break the stereotyping, responding to the patriarchy that has kept women behind, and there is progress. But one thing that has to change is attitudes … That’s why we’re including men now in all our advocacy efforts. We want to hear from them about what it takes to see women on an equal footing in every aspect of life, professional and otherwise, without women having to compromise on whatever they decide to be."

Madam Johnson Sirleaf, who founded the EJS Center for Women and Development in Liberia in 2018, insisted that positive changes are being made that are “real [and] irreversible” but they must be accelerated. "If we stay at this pace, it will take us about a generation to achieve full equity," she said.
MODERATOR: The world is moving into the Fourth Industrial Revolution but most African youth don’t have secondary education. How do we participate in this revolution given the very big challenges we face?

According to Ms. Roy, Africa still has “so much work to do to get the basics right,” but there is growing evidence of productive collaboration between private industry and the education sector. For example, she noted that the Mastercard Foundation is working with industry-focused university institutes and private vocational centers in Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Kenya to offer skills training in multiple disciplines.

She said educational institutions could do a lot, working with other universities and the private sector, to better prepare future workers. That means putting together a pipeline of apprenticeships, internships, and more experiential, on-the-job learning so that entering the workforce “isn’t a foreign or alien adventure.”

MODERATOR: What are the low-hanging fruit areas that could yield good social and economic rewards?

According to Ms. Banda, education, stronger collaboration between Africa’s regions, and leadership are low-hanging fruits, with progress already underway. “Positive things are happening; it is time to talk up Africa instead of talking down Africa,” she said.

“Electrification is a low-hanging fruit,” added Mr. Ghanem. “We have solar, off-grid and mini-grids technology. We can electrify all of Africa.” Although to do so, he emphasized, “requires political will [and] working together across the continent.”

Mr. Mayaki said leaders need “to get into the nitty-gritty” of implementation, particularly when starting with weak institutions. “The more we focus on sectoral issues, the more we see the multi- and cross-sectoral dimensions of problems and solutions. The institutional capacity to tackle issues in this way is growing and leadership is critical.”

Lastly, Ms. Songwe ended on an optimistic note, saying that low-hanging fruit is all around. “Everywhere there are young people with ideas, there is opportunity,” she said. “There are tons of fantastic ideas on the continent looking for ways to scale. I believe the AfCFTA is our Marshall Plan.”
The second group discussion featured a diverse set of panelists from the public and private sector commenting on various aspects of leadership that’s needed for improved African collaboration, both in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19 and to ensure long-term development success. BBC News presenter and reporter Nancy Kacungira moderated the discussion.

**MODERATOR:** After the pandemic, what will Africa’s recovery look like and what has been the impact on the African Union Agenda 2063, which was already quite ambitious?

“COVID-19 gives Africa a huge opportunity to tackle its two major challenges—leadership and ownership; all the other challenges stem from these two,” said UN Special Adviser on Africa Cristina Duarte. As an example, she referred to Africa’s energy gap, which she says requires $500 billion to bridge between now and 2030. Over the same time, she added, Africa will lose about $890 billion in illicit financial flows.

“We can say that Africa has money,” she insisted, “but lacks the ability to mobilize those resources for its development needs. Resolving this challenge requires leadership and ownership of our financial flows.

She also emphasized the need for “strong, transparent, and accountable institutions” as well as strong regulatory and audit bodies at the local level. But they can’t operate in a vacuum, she added: “You also need processes, systems, norms, procedures, and also an organized civil society with a voice.”

**MODERATOR:** In your experience as an industrialist and employer, what is the impact of leadership?

Tony Oteng-Gyasi, the Executive Chairman of Tropical Cable and Conductor Ltd. and former head of the Association of Ghana Industries, said he...
wanted to emphasize the theme of the discussion: leadership at all levels. At the national level, he said, more accountable leadership is needed to ensure constitutional provisions promote rapid development.

“Accountable leadership is also required in the private sector,” he added, to recognize a “common agenda with the public sector. The profit-seeking motive of the private sector and the national development agenda are not mutually exclusive.”

Mr. Oteng-Gyasi argued that in the context of the AfCFTA, the practical experience of the private sector—the operators on the ground—should inform regulations. “It should not be left to policymakers to set a ‘take it or leave it’ agenda, because there are many nuances to the politics and policies of economic integration.”

MODERATOR: Do you feel that your advocacy is limited by a system that itself needs to change or is it just a matter of having the right attitudes and political will to achieve the progress you are pushing for?

“COVID has taught us that we are on our own,” said Edwin Ikhuoria, Africa Executive Director for the ONE Campaign. “While the richer countries have spent trillions of dollars to revamp their economies, Africa is barely able to put 2 percent of its GDP into the recovery process.” Beyond that, Mr. Ikhuoria said, the global finance and development system is impeding Africa’s progress. He referred to the debt-service suspension initiative (DSSI), a multilateral framework created to provide relief for the poorest countries. African nations that participated in the DSSI arrangement “got downgraded, forcing them to get money from financial markets at a much higher cost. Africa already had a liquidity crisis before the pandemic.”

Mr. Ikhuoria said the international finance system needed immediate reform to address the structural inequities and increase access to poor and developing countries. “It’s not about pity and charity,” he said. “It’s a matter of justice.”

MODERATOR: Panels these days are always talking about young people. As a young person, do you feel involved? Do you feel hopeful about the future?

“Our main objective as young people coming into spaces such as this one is to reassure the leadership that we have something to bring to the table,” said innovation entrepreneur and youth advocate Merryl Omondi. She said youth engagement must be about more than “ticking all the boxes” to assure donors, funders, and even voters that young people are being included. “What we’re pushing for now is inclusion in policy design and implementation.” She said that youth activists across the continent should work to ensure that when leadership conversations are happening, “we’re coming in to showcase exactly what we are doing and trying to do.”

Ms. Omondi also called attention to the rise of gender-based violence and other hardships for women after the onset of COVID-19. “Over 200,000 girls dropped out of school, many deterred by violence from getting resources to go to school,” she said. Describing a small initiative she runs in Homa Bay County, Kenya, to support young women, she said it had been “very difficult to get from government offices the resources to help us make sure that everyone going through abuse does not lack the opportunity to grow as a human being.”

MODERATOR: Moving from the local to the continental level, how can collaboration and integration help Africa to meet the needs of its people?

According to Ms. Duarte, African countries must first focus on the “high level of dysfunction” in their economies—she noted the size of the informal sector, weak institutions, terrorism, and illicit financial flows as examples—in order to promote a successful, collaborative approach to development. “From our right hand we lose $80 to $90 billion a year [in illicit flows] and with our left hand we beg for money. We need to get ourselves together and overcome this paradox. If you want to promote in each country better collaboration between policy makers, the private sector, young people, and civil society organizations, we need to address the structural issues, the root causes.”
Mr. Diarrassouba said that Africa’s booming youth population elevated the need for action around challenges such as value addition and job creation. “We have to rethink education to orient students towards science and technology and to promote professional training,” he said. “We should also not have any complex about external collaboration. It’s not strange for us to work with bilateral and multilateral institutions.” But, he added, “We also have to be self-reliant, with an emphasis on transforming our raw materials and strengthening collaboration at regional and continental level, notably through the AfCFTA.”
To further illustrate the potential economic power of integrating to transform, as well as the need for leadership across all levels of society, ATF2021 featured a selection of video profiles of emerging leaders in African civil society and the private sector. In each instance, the invited guest offered a short description of his or her enterprise or endeavor, and the ways in which an integrated Africa could yield even greater results. A transcript of each video spotlight is presented here.

**Ify Umunna, Co-founder & Co-CEO, Nourishing Africa**

A digital platform aimed at equipping and connecting young agri-food entrepreneurs across Africa.

"We have built a virtual community of over 55,000 agri-food entrepreneurs and enthusiasts across our various platforms and channels, where they connect directly with one another and gain access to opportunities including funding, data, learning resources, events, talents, and other tools they need to scale their businesses. Our mission is to drive the sustainable growth of the agriculture and food landscape by attracting, empowering, equipping, connecting, and celebrating over 1 million dynamic and innovative young agri-food entrepreneurs. We do this with a vision of a just and flourishing food ecosystem that leverages agricultural technology and digital innovation and is driven by these vibrant entrepreneurs who will see our continent become food secure and net exporters of food to the world by 2050.

Tech and innovation are integral to what we do. For us, a more integrated Africa is a game changer. Not only will it allow for more tangible collaboration and partnerships between small and medium enterprises across the continent, it will also spark further innovation because these young entrepreneurs are no longer going to be stifled by red tape when thinking of new ways to solve decades-old problems within our sector. An integrated Africa will lead to more meaningful jobs across the entire value chain as business are able to trade and grow. A more integrated Africa is the way for us to truly achieve our vision of being food secure and net exporters to the world."

The full virtual ATF is available to view online at [www.acetforafrica.org/atf](http://www.acetforafrica.org/atf)
Wiebe Boer, CEO, All On

An investment company set up by Shell to address off-grid energy in Nigeria.

“There are over 100 million Nigerians who are off the grid or have bad supply, which is about one-sixth of the total Africans in that situation. So addressing this problem in Nigeria is a huge deal. We are impact investors, investing directly in businesses that are delivering clean energy to low-income communities and small businesses. We also invest through funds, and have an All On hub funded by the Rockefeller Foundation to provide non-financial technical support to businesses in this space. Finally, we have a team that makes grants and does advocacy for an enabling environment for the sector.

We know this sector has huge potential and if there was alignment in energy policy and regulations across Africa many of the companies we invest in would be able to grow much faster instead of having to redesign their business model for every country. With the opening up of markets in Africa across borders, there is also a multi-billion dollar opportunity, in Nigeria for example, in manufacturing equipment for the off-grid space and being able to sell it freely across Africa. Our offices in Lagos are powered by made-in-Nigeria solar panels, and imagine how much they could sell in the ECOWAS region and beyond. Energy is a massive problem in Africa, but if we work together and integrate, I think we can solve it quite quickly, together.”

Manuela Mulondo, Founder & CEO, The Cradle

A 24-hour childcare and lactation service designed for the workplace.

“We partner governments, organizations, businesses, and mothers to set up spaces for lactation in the workplace. Our dream is an Africa where women are free to maximize their full potential and still enjoy raising Africa’s human capital. An integrated Africa is one that allows The Cradle to spread this model across the continent so that the sole responsibility for unpaid care work, including child care, is lifted off women. We can have more women in places of power and influence and together change the trajectory of Africa’s destiny.”

The full virtual ATF is available to view online at www.acetforafrica.org/atf
Joshua Amponsem, Founder, Green Africa Youth Organization

A youth-led advocacy group working with young people to take action on climate change.

"Climate change is devastating our continent. Food insecurity, constant floods and droughts and so on are harming women and children in particular and robbing young people of a future. We work with young people, giving them skills, training them and empowering them to take action locally. For example, in the Adansi South community in Ghana, we are working with young people to collect organic waste from markets and turn it into compost fertilizer for organic farming. We are also supporting farmers to practice more climate-smart agriculture and to convert agricultural waste into charcoal briquettes, which reduces deforestation and allows women to have smokeless and clean charcoal for cooking. This is improving their health and supporting their livelihoods. We have also been able to provide job opportunities for over 90 young people in 2020 alone. In northern Ghana and in Mali, we are working with young entrepreneurs to convert waste into useful resources. We work on biodiversity projects that support agro-forestry and agro-ecology which are very important for food systems in Africa.

All these initiatives can be scaled up across Africa if we have strong unity and commitment to communicating, engaging, and working together as a continent. We hope that by building a stronger regulatory framework across the continent, projects like this can be replicated around Africa. With the support of ACET and all development actors and governments and young people taking action on climate, I believe that we can make Africa very resilient and able to adapt to climate change."

The full virtual ATF is available to view online at www.acetforafrica.org/atf
Ms. Mavis Owusu-Gyamfi

ACET Executive Vice President

Ms. Owusu-Gyamfi offered thanks on behalf of ACET and its partners to all viewers and participants, with a special note of appreciation to the ATF’s special guests: Ghana Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia, Madame Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, South Africa Finance Minister Tito Mboweni, Côte d’Ivoire Minister of Trade and Industry Souleymane Diarrassouba, and UN Under-Secretary-General Cristina Duarte. She also thanked the members of the Transformation Leadership Panel and those who participated in the conversation on leadership.

“Your time and your insights on these issues have made this a truly remarkable event,” she said. “The discussion has been excellent, but we have much to carry forward.” In particular, she highlighted five key points that emerged as common themes.

First, Africa is making progress, she said, but the pace of change needs to be quickened.

Second, some countries are integrating to transform, “but we need to scale up these examples across the continent—urgently. Time is of the essence.”

Third, the best way to transform the challenges around jobs, innovation, and climate into opportunities is to deal with them together, she said.

The fourth point she made is that Africa’s partners need to align behind a common economic transformation agenda.

Lastly, she reiterated one of the main themes of the forum—that leadership to tackle Africa’s transformation challenges is needed across the board.

“We need leaders in government, in business, in civil society, and amongst ourselves as citizens,” she said. “We are all leaders, and we must drive and own this agenda. We need to work together to transform Africa.”

In that context, Ms. Owusu-Gyamfi urged everyone to visit ACET’s web site to download and read the latest African Transformation Report, Integrating to Transform.

“We are proud of the report,” she said, “but we know it’s just a starting point. Our ambition is for it to become a catalyst for action.”

And to do that, she announced, ACET will keep the conversation going with a series of webinars “to turn the report’s recommendations into meaningful, actionable next steps.” Each webinar will focus on a separate theme in Integrating to Transform to enable policymakers, technical experts, business leaders, young people, civil society, and development partners to delve deeper into the issues of jobs, innovation, and climate.

In closing the forum, Ms. Owusu-Gyamfi thanked the ACET staff and partners responsible for Integrating to Transform and ATF2021.

“I strongly believe the energy and appetite for dialogue and action around economic transformation will only grow in the years ahead,” she said. “And I hope you will join us in continuing to champion this issue. Let’s work together to transform our beloved continent.”