

‘No conversation about Africa without Africans’

Ahunna Eziakonwa, UNDP Africa director, talks about new perspectives for international cooperation, the empowerment of Africa and its implications for migration to Europe



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KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Back in 2019, you advised the new European Commission to be less short-sighted towards African countries than Europe has been in the past.

EZIAKONWA: Indeed, and I think the current process for a new EU-Africa strategy reflects a fundamental shift in this regard. There now is an understanding that the destinies of both regions are intertwined, and that their relationship needs to be based on equal partnership and mutual respect.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: What could the European Union and Germany do to achieve a more equal partnership with African countries?

EZIAKONWA: The first thing to do is to change a prevailing narrative that arose from a donor-recipient culture and describes African people as dependent on charitable gifts. If you are constantly served an image of disease and misery, little wonder you do not believe in the capacity dwelling in Africa. But there are Africans who are busting their backs to develop their communities and countries. Their voices need to be heard and they need to have a seat at the table.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Talking about having a seat at the table, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed to Germany and France in July to cooperate on Africa. Could this be to the benefit of the continent?

EZIAKONWA: There should be no conversation about Africa without Africans. Otherwise, we're going back to times when other countries met and agreed on how to divide up the African continent. And with the African Union as a platform to address the continent collectively, the world no longer has the excuse that there is no one to talk to.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Returning to the present, how did African countries get through the coronavirus pandemic so far?

EZIAKONWA: Africa has shown immense resilience. The coronavirus is not our first pandemic, and several African governments and people deployed their experiences from the Ebola outbreak and the

HIV/AIDS epidemic. Africa has gathered several best practices that it can share with the rest of the world.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: For example?

EZIAKONWA: The concept of solidarity. The Ethiopian government, for instance, placed its airline at the disposal of the rest of the continent to distribute medical equipment. And regarding innovative solutions. In Togo, a digital cash transfer platform called Novissi was built within ten days and helped the government to identify the poorest of the poor and facilitated the cash transfer to support them.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: What about the economic impact of the pandemic?

EZIAKONWA: The economy of several African countries depends 80 to 90 per cent on tourism so the downturn is devastating. But African economies will bounce back. There are two complementary ways out of the crisis. First, global solidarity in the form of financial relief measures. Second, a vaccinated population. Most African countries lack the financial resources to get as many vaccines as they need. As we are speaking, the continent's vaccination rate is less than two per cent. To change this, other countries must step in and help.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: South Africa has already called on the World Trade Organization last year to temporarily waive intellectual property rules related to COVID-19. Germany, among other countries, opposes this idea.

EZIAKONWA: These countries need to reconsider their position, even in their own interest. We are living in a globalized world today. It is not possible to isolate yourself and let the rest of the world struggle. Especially Germany must understand the

link between Africa's ability to recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and its capacity to handle other priorities, such as the green transformation.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Speaking of Germany, what do you expect of the next German government?

EZIAKONWA: To look at Africa as a place where you can set up industry. That is fundamental to give jobs to all these young people who are graduating from university, hungry to contribute to the world.

Germany has been a leading force in empowering young Africans with skills. The next government should continue with this concept to go beyond aid because this will lead to an increase of consumption power and an expanding middle class. From a pure trade perspective, this can only be good news for Europe. The same goes regarding the European fear of a surge of migrants.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: What would you recommend the next German government regarding its migration policy?

EZIAKONWA: The same advice I give everyone preoccupied with this issue – to see migration as an opportunity and not as a crisis. Most African migration, 80 per cent, still takes place within the continent. The small minority that ends up in Europe wants to contribute to the economy. Legal pathways would be one way to overcome the irregular nature of migration, which leads to the loss of lives and creates weird dynamics in the host countries. Migration will happen, it is a human condition. This is my message to the next German government. We should not invest so much energy in trying to stop it. For me, this is a denial of reality.



When dealing with migration and refugees, which measures should Germany and the EU increasingly focus on?

