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Leadership for the Future: Resilience and Inclusion

2021 Policy Spotlight Briefing Transcript for Policy Spotlight Briefing

Speakers

- Yolanda Sangweni, Senior Director of Programming, National Public Radio
- Elizabeth Liu, Special Coordinator for the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), U.S. Department of State
- Judd Devermont, Director, Africa Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)
- Belinda Jackson Farrier, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Diplomacy, Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State
- Silas Njacheun Ngahane, Programs Coordinator, African Union Commission (2019 Mandela Washington Fellow Alumnus, African Union)

Session Transcript

Yolanda Sangweni: Fellows and guests, I hope you are enjoying the Ignite Talks. Please share your thoughts in the chat, and on social media. Use the hashtag: #YALI2021, and tell us about the great work the Fellows are doing. And next up on our agenda there will be an important policy discussion being led by Elizabeth Liu, YALI Program Coordinator for the Department of State.

Next up is the Plenary Policy Spotlight Briefing, featuring Acting Assistant Secretary for Public Diplomacy, Belinda Jackson Farrier; Judd Devermont of CSIS; and alum of the program, Silas Ngahane. Please welcome Elizabeth Liu.

Elizabeth Liu: Hi, everyone! Congratulations 2021 Fellows. I'm so excited to be here with you today, thank you for joining us and thank you for all of your hard work to make it through this program.

We're excited to have a great conversation today around the policy spotlight. As you've just heard from Yolanda, we have an excellent spotlight, including Belinda Jackson Ferrier from the Department of State, alumnus Silas Ngahane, and Judd Devermont from the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

So, I'd like to go ahead and get things started so we can fit in as many questions as possible. And I want to turn it over to Belinda for a brief introduction. Over to you. Belinda.



Belinda Jackson Ferrier: Great. Thank you, Liz. And good morning and good afternoon to everyone who's joining us today. I'm excited to be here, to listen, to learn, and to share some thoughts about the U.S. and Africa relationship.

I'm very familiar with the YALI Program from my own experiences in the field. In Togo, I helped to select some members of the very first cohort of YALI. And in Rwanda, where I served as deputy chief of mission, I also had many opportunities to interact with YALI alumni, and share, and engage. So, I'm very excited to be here with all of you today.

It's clear to me that as we look at Africa's future, its political, economic, and social landscape will be shaped by its young people. And it's like those of you, here today at this Summit. You represent the diverse and truly remarkable group. You're entrepreneurs, creating jobs; civil servants, guiding organizations; journalists, defending freedom of speech; and doctors and scientists, promoting health and well-being.

Africa is a priority in this administration, and while we're seeking to expand and grow the U.S.-Africa relationship, we're also building upon a strong foundation. Our relationship has evolved over decades, to become one of cooperation and mutual respect. And I look forward to expanding upon various aspects of that partnership with all of you today. Thank you.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you, Belinda. Okay, now let's hear from Silas, who's a Program Coordinator at the African Union Commission.

Silas Ngahane: Hi, good morning everyone. My name is Silas Ngahane. I'm from Cameroon, and I'm the current U.S.-A.U. Programs Coordinator as well as a 2019 YALI alumnus. And I would like to congratulate you first on being part of this great family of young African leaders. It's a great opportunity and a great way to advance the relationship with the U.S., as well as building a great foundation for the future generations.

I've worked over the years to support, also, the program on YALI through the U.S. mission on the African Union; supported the process of briefing and taking different participants and YALI Fellows within the different tracks, and also briefing them on various activities we are doing; encouraging to really take part in the program, and harness and leverage on all the opportunities the program is providing us on the continent.

I'm grateful for all of the opportunities that the program is providing us, and happy to be part of the panel as well. And I would like to send our sincere gratitude to the Department of State, for having this program that is allowing young people to explore ways of building the continent and creating opportunity for the older generation to really have their voice on the continent.

Good to see you, and happy to be here with the panel. Thank you.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you, Silas. And thank you for all that you do.

And last but not least, let's go to Judd Devermont.

Judd Devermont: Thanks, Liz. Hi, everyone. I'm the Director of the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I've been at CSIS for three years now, but in a previous life I've worked for the U.S. government: in our embassy in Abuja, Nigeria; at the White House, under President Obama; I also was the Senior Analyst for the U.S. Government under sub-Saharan Africa.

And some of the work that I do connects really deeply to the conversations that you're having in your work, and what you do in your Fellowships. We focus on how Africans, and African diaspora, enrich American life, in American cities. And many of the people that we interviewed talked about the YALI Program as a central way in which Americans connect with the continent. But we also do a series called "Africa Reacts," where we ask our colleagues on the continent to share their thoughts on U.S. politics and U.S.-Africa policy, something I hope we'll do a little bit of today.

I have a long history with the YALI Program myself--when I was in the Obama Administration, the White House, it was when the program was getting up on its feet, and about to launch in a more dramatic way. And then at CSIS we were really proud that in 2019 we hosted a YALI Fellow. So this is going to be a great conversation. More important than us talking is hearing your questions and your thoughts, so I'm looking forward to it. Thanks.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you so much, Judd. And I guess I'll introduce myself for a moment. I'm the YALI coordinator at the U.S. Department of State. So I work closely with the Fellowship team, as well as USAID, who runs the regional leadership centers, and the YALI Network Team, to support the program in any way I can.

I've learned so much from the Fellows throughout my tour, and so much about Africa from meeting with exchange participants, whether it be from YALI, International Center for Leadership Program, or others. And I'm just very excited to be here today for the conversation. [Text Wrapping Break][Text Wrapping Break]So let's get right into it. It's a policy spotlight, so I'm going to start with a policy question, and this one is for Belinda to start us off. How has U.S. policy towards Africa changed under this new administration, and what are the United States' top priorities on the continent?

Belinda Jackson Ferrier: Great, Liz. Thanks for that question.

I would offer that this is an opportunity to reignite the relationship between the U.S. and Africa. We have seen that through early comments and remarks by President Biden early in the administration, as well as Secretary Blinken's virtual trip to Kenya and Nigeria earlier this year, in which he had an opportunity to engage both in official bilateral meetings, as well as in different activities that allowed him to connect with people on the ground. He also demonstrated very early in his tenure his interest in the YALI program, and his interest, and the administration's interest in supporting youth in Africa through a roundtable that we held for YALI participants earlier this year, as well.

In terms of policies, I think that the administration will continue to be focused on democracy and good governance through peace and security; climate change; and additionally, through health diplomacy, as you probably have seen in terms of the donations of Covid vaccines that have been landing throughout the continent in the last few weeks. And in addition to that, we will also remain very focused on trade and investment issues.

And recently, we announced reigniting an initiative called Prosper Africa, which will bring the power of 17 different federal agencies together to help increase two-way trade between the U.S. and Africa. And I know that is something that many of you are very interested in. So in my view, those are some of the top priorities and top interests we can look forward to as this administration unfolds.

Thanks, Liz.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you, Belinda. Judd, do you have anything to add from your perspective?

Judd Devermont: Yeah. The way I would characterize the Biden-Harris administration is: more engaged, more responsive, and more global when it comes to their outlook towards Africa. And I think that's in contrast with the previous administration, which was a little more neglectful, at times mean-spirited, and perhaps a little too China-obsessed.

And I think Belinda mentioned a couple of the ways in which this administration is more engaged. President Biden has now spoken to President Kenyatta and President Ramaphosa twice: before his inauguration, and after; delivered the video message to the African Union. But of course also Vice President Harris and Secretary Blinken have all been engaged. We had five African leaders come to the Climate Summit, so certainly, I think we are at a higher ops tempo for engagement at the most senior levels.

The responsiveness and particularly the way that this administration has been rolling out the vaccines is incredibly important, but also the level of engagement we're seeing on the crisis in Ethiopia is really important to highlight.

And then, finally, global, right. The Biden team sees Africa as part of a global community, and it has been very supportive of the prominent sons and daughters of the continent that are in senior positions, whether we're talking about Dr. Tedros at the [World Health Organization], or Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala at the [World Trade Organization]. We have seen a lot of engagement with African leaders at the UN, through our Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, who is a former Secretary of State of Africa [and] is very well-versed in these issues.

So I think those are really important, but in many ways those are just a return, right? A return to the policies that we saw under Presidents Clinton, and Bush, and Obama. It's a re-emphasis on bipartisanship, which has been so important in U.S. policy towards Africa.

But I do want to highlight a couple of things that I think are new, and different, and important. One, obviously, is Covid-19. That's partly because of the moment, but this administration is focused, in everything it does, on how do we address the pandemic and its economic and its health implications. But then climate has been a big priority for this administration, and will continue to be a huge part of everything they do.

And then I think there are already some signals about more engagement with the diaspora, which is incredibly important.

And then a couple of things may be coming down the pipe: more focus on anti-corruption; more focus on digital technology and how that can be transformative for African economies; and then urbanization. So those are some things that are new, different, that I would watch out for.

And then I don't want to miss the opportunity--since I don't work for the U.S. Government, I'll put out a couple things that we should all be watching for. In terms of things [for which] I don't know where we're landing yet. It's still early days, we don't have everyone in position.

But there's been a strong commitment to democracy and governance, but there are still really strong and challenging trade-offs in places like Chad. And I think we'll have to watch and see how the administration handles those issues in being consistent across 49 countries--or 53 countries, or 55 countries, depending on how you count it--on democracy and governance. On security, this administration is committed to looking at more efficiency in the way that we do security and cooperation, but there will be a question about what kind of posture and presence the U.S. military will have in Africa. China is a big priority and challenge for the globe, but the U.S., and how that will roll out in Africa, is still early days.

And finally, I agree Belinda, this administration cares about Africa. But time and attention is always so important, and always in question. So something to see: how many times Africa comes in these major speeches, and takes the time of the President and Vice President, Secretary of State.

So, I'll end there. Thanks. [2:49:00]

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you, Judd and Belinda. Really appreciate these remarks and observations of the renewed commitment to the continent. But many of the priorities stay the same: democracy and good governance and economic prosperity. But we are also seeing priorities around climate change and health.

And I do want to echo Belinda's remarks highlighting the Secretary's roundtable with YALI. One thing that I get asked as YALI Coordinator is, will YALI continue? And, yes. It has endured for the past ten years through different administrations. Africa's commitment to youth is strong and unwavering.

We have now 5,000 Alumni--more than 5,000 from the Fellowship, more than 20,000 from the regional leadership centers, and more than 700,000 members of the YALI network. And so we truly are Africa's future, and that commitment will always continue.

With that, I want to turn to a question from one of our Fellows from Nigeria.

Dielamo Mederi Oyeghe: My name is Dielamo. I am from Nigeria, Business Track at Northwestern University.

Advancing U.S.-Africa relations are determined more by U.S. policies and actions towards Africa. What new policies does the U.S. Government have to strengthen their relationship with Africa owing to a growing Chinese influence on the continent and a declining U.S. influence?

Elizabeth Liu: Okay, thank you for that question. China's influence cannot be ignored, and certainly combatting China is a huge priority. I want to give Silas a chance to answer this question first.

Silas Ngahane: Thank you, Liz. And thank you, Belinda and Judd, for your comments earlier.

I think definitely the participant is pointing out how the U.S. Influence is slowly being taken over by China on the continent. And it's quite worrisome, the situation that we are living. We want to see more of the U.S. Government intervention and actions on the ground, to really push for more approaches on better rule of law on the continent, and also human rights, as well as more investment in areas of trade and trying to help mature our economy on the continent.

We've seen over the years a little bit of challenge in terms of looking deeply into, what are those challenges that we need to really overcome, in terms of peace and security. We have the overgrowing issue in the Sahel region; as Judd mentioned we also have some challenges now in new democracies that are coming up here, after different transitions that we are witnessing on the continent. We need more U.S. investment and engagement to really support those young democracies on the continent to mature and come to be able to strive on their own.

And lastly, as well, we need to see the U.S. Government really supporting African public health institutions, and really looking at how we are ready to respond to major health threats that we are facing around the world. You remember the issues of ebola, which are still not completely over. But we work hard to try to curb the spread of ebola, but at times you have pockets of ebola, cases coming up here and there, in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo].

So we turn to the U.S. as a strong partner to Africa, to step up their engagement to the continent. And try to look at some of the policies that have been there over decades now, to revamp some of the frameworks that govern how the U.S.-Africa relationship has been handled over the years, and then we can see new development on the continent.

Also in view of what we are seeing today on the continent, of having one market to the African continent/ trade area. We are really looking to see a strong sense of engagement from the U.S. Government to support and help those businesses in Africa to mature. And to have the possibility of African businesses to really work with U.S. businesses, to really leverage on all of the trade opportunities that have been stated in the African Growth Opportunity Act.

So we are really eager to work with the U.S. Government through different programs and high-level dialogues we've been holding over the years with the State Department. And slowly we are getting there. And hopefully, with building with all of the partners in the U.S., we will get there. Thank you, Liz.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you so much. Really appreciate that perspective.

And I know in Cameroon, in particular, China's influence is strong. We've heard from our Public Affairs Officer that they're giving scholarships out like candy, and YALI's really becoming a really recognized youth program there, that's very popular.

So I want to turn to Belinda now, to see if she has anything to say.

Belinda Jackson Ferrier: Sure, thank you, Liz. And Silas, thank you for those comments, that was really helpful.

I would offer that--I would want to frame the discussion a little differently. And not one as adversarial, but rather as an opportunity to really highlight the U.S. as [having] long-standing and deep commitments and relationships on the continent. And so we can see that through exchanges, and people-to-people connections--for example, through programs like Fulbright or even YALI, where we are making an investment for the long term.

And those aren't always the flashiest investments, those aren't always the big things that are easy to put on a billboard. But they're the ones that matter and really demonstrate our values, and our commitment.

I would also highlight that through our efforts to increase trade and investment, we're really investing not just, again, in big, splashy projects. But rather, we're investing in businesses and people, and helping you make deals, and helping you build networks, and make connections. And so through

things like Prosper [Africa], we're really showing that we're willing to take resources from around the government and really invest our time, and invest those resources in spaces that are going to make a difference.

I think we've seen long-term commitments in the health field, like the President's Emergency Initiative on HIV and AIDS, also known as PEPFAR, or through investments in education around the continent. That we are looking at generational change, and generational impacts.

And I think that that is the kind of thing that demonstrates that we are partners, we have mutual respect. We're not just looking for win-wins, but we're looking for, how can we help to invest in each other where we all have a mutual interest? Because on many things--whether it is violent extremism, or climate change--we're in this together. And we need to work together, and that takes a lot of commitment, and a long time.

And I think the U.S. has shown that we are here to do that work. And so I hope that that, in the long term, is what people walk away with when they look at the U.S. relationship in the African continent, with different countries, and different actors, in different spaces, and when they compare it elsewhere in the geopolitical space.

And so I'll stop there. Thank you.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you, Belinda. We're absolutely in it for the long haul.

We're ready for another question from a fellow.

Thierno Souleymane Diop Niang: Hello. My name is Thierno Souleymane Diop Niang. I'm from Senegal, West Africa. I'm a foreign policy specialist, and I followed the Public Management [track] at Syracuse University.

Today, extremism is literally destroying this zone, particularly the Sahel. Many countries from Europe tried to support ECOWAS [the Economic Community of West African States] for ending this situation. How and what will the United States do for young people or civil society organizations to get the necessary tools against radicalism?

Elizabeth Liu: Okay, thank you for that question. Judd, I know you're doing some really exciting work in this space, so I want to hand it over to you.

Judd Devermont: Thanks. And such an important question. I'm really glad that we are talking about that today.

Just for the broader audience: how bad are things in the Sahel? Since the start of 2019, the Sahel has seen a 50 percent rise in violent events that have resulted in 15,000 fatalities. These attacks have forced a record number of people to leave their homes. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, internal displacement in the Sahel has quadrupled over the past two years, to 2 million internally displaced people.

So it is a serious crisis. And the international response has largely been to double down on the same strategy for the past decade, so that's: more envoies, more money, more military. And what I really like about your question is you're asking us, what can civil society do? How can the U.S. Government help with young people playing a role in reversing these trends?

And I think there's a couple of ways in which that can happen. And I should acknowledge that YALI, and other programs, are a great example of what the U.S. is already doing. And it's part and parcel of talking to young people about violent extremism, and talking about the instability. I think that's almost like, by definition, what the diplomats and aid workers do, day by day.

But here's a couple of ideas that I think we can all do together. One is--I think that countries in the Sahel, or in West Africa, including your country in Senegal--where populations hold their leaders to account, tell politicians, tell government officials that the insecurity is unacceptable, that corruption is unacceptable, make it part of a daily conversation--are much more likely to have leaders who are going to invest justly and smartly in the sort of responses they need and the partnerships they need. In the other countries that I have seen where there is not a strong civil society action, the governments just largely outsource it to the international community. It doesn't seem to be a huge priority for them, in terms of the way they allocate their own domestic budgets, and the conversations they have amongst themselves. So civil society as a watchdog is a really important input, and sometimes I think we don't see that as much as we should, if we really want to be catalytic.

The second one is that--and I would love to see the U.S. Government do more here--is if civil society doesn't have to be in the CDE [Community Development Entity] business as much as it should be in the justice business, in the anti-corruption business, and in the security sector accountability plan of attack. If you do those three things--and we just wrote a report called "False Choices: U.S. Strategy toward Coastal West Africa and the Sahel"--but those three focus areas really do help. Not only in

terms of CDE and addressing the insecurity, but it also helps with democracy and backsliding. It also helps in terms of, when you have foreign governments that are being malign in terms of their investments.

So those are some things that I think youth and civil society are really well-poised to do, and whereas the military responses, obviously are going to be more likely from governments and the international community. But there is an opportunity here for young people with partners to really press their governments, and work within their society to make sure that these key areas are addressed. And so, in that way, preventing further radicalization.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you so much, Judd. Belinda, anything to add?

Belinda Jackson Ferrier: Not much to add. I think Judd really got right to the heart of the matter there.

I just want to offer that through its development and security assistance, that the U.S. gives in many spaces on this issue.

I think there's an opportunity to frame the conversation, and look at creative ways in which civil society and youth actors can be involved in that conversation, and in really helping the U.S. Government to understand where the gaps are, and where we need their assistance filling in. So I think that forums like this are a really great opportunity to do that.

Thank you.

Elizabeth Liu: And Judd, really quickly, I'm curious if you could share with us the work that you are doing with Moussa, one of the fellows? I think it's a great example of post-Fellowship collaboration.

Judd Devermont: We've been doing some really cool work with him.

Most recently we published our 10th, maybe 12th edition of "Africa Reacts," which is--as I said earlier, my job is to talk about what is happening in Africa, and that's not that fair. My view is, as much as I talk about political developments in sub-Saharan Africa, Africans should be invited to tell us what they think about our own politics and U.S. politics.

And so, we had Moussa recently come and share his views about the Covid-19 vaccine distribution: is it working, both in America, and is America working on behalf of their partners in Africa to get out this incredibly important resource? Moussa had some incredibly smart and incisive comments on both of these.

And then, just because I think the organization that he works for, Accountability Lab [Mali], is fantastic, he's also been on our podcast, *Into Africa*, to talk about some of the developments in Mali as well as in Chad. Sharing his views on how we work with partners, particularly civil society to address the democratic deficits in those countries. And what should be the key outcomes of the Democracy Summit that the administration should have--and that's this year, beginning of next year, maybe Belinda knows better on the timeline.

But the YALI fellows, you guys are the future of the continent. And so it's always wonderful to be able to engage with alumni, and hear your thoughts, and elevate it, and showcase it so that Americans, particularly U.S. policymakers, can understand how you are thinking about some of the biggest challenges.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you for that, Judd. And speaking of going to African voices, I'm going to call on Silas for the next question that we have from one of our alumni. This is coming from Grace Baba from Liberia. She asks, "how can we effectively deal with misinformation and misconceptions about Africa, and the U.S. Relationship?"

Silas Ngahane: Thank you, Liz. And thank you, Baba, for this great question. And hi from Liberia.

I think that the challenge of misinformation lies in how the media portrays the happenings on the continent. And we can see that some challenges are sparked by elements portrayed in the media and articles. It's important that we have ways of fact-checking information that we receive on a daily basis.

And there are a plethora of institutions and also media platforms that are doing fact checking, and we also have the alumni from the YALI program who are also part of such institutions. And I know one, actually, from Senegal, who is very active on the scene to actually work on supporting efforts to curb down the issue of misinformation.

We were reminding ourselves--during the very beginning of the pandemic, we--as a cohort from the University of Wisconsin-Madison during our program--we were able to organize ourselves to hold some sessions in terms of supporting each other as Mandela Fellows, to deal with the challenges that the pandemic was bringing. On both issues related to the vaccine, the pandemic, and the misinformation that was going about, the whole conspiracy around this. And his support was very welcome during those sessions we were holding, to really provide us with the right information.

So it's important to reach out to and also crosscheck information we receive in general, as social media has become a vehicle of information but misinformation also can lead to the wrong actions on our part. So I would really encourage you to crosscheck and fact-check your information before--as we are trending now--sharing messages and forwarding as soon as we receive them. It's important that we do our own judging before spreading information that may be false and could lead people to go in the wrong direction.

Thank you. I will end there.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you, Silas.

Belinda, I know misinformation and disinformation is something we've been focused on a lot at the [State] Department. Do you have anything to add?

Belinda Jackson Ferrier: Just a little bit here, in that I would say that this idea of combating misinformation and disinformation is one that I don't know if we all have all the answers to quite yet. It is a quickly evolving space, and one in which there is a lot of disinformation coming to people from various different spaces, whether that's social media, or SMS and texting, or even just rumors that they hear, or even from different what would considered traditional media outlets, or at times even official sourcing that doesn't seem quite right.

So I think that this idea, on a practical level, of checking and rechecking your sources is certainly one that we can all implement and better identify what would be good sources.

But in other respects, I would add that the part we can control, in terms of these broader myths about our different spaces--like there are a lot of myths about the United States that I have encountered as a diplomat, and working around the world. And I have always found that when we have an opportunity to talk face-to-face, when we have an opportunity to travel, and see each other, and meet, and when those opportunities are possible again, those make lasting impressions; bring clarity where before all we had was myths and instability, and are really helpful in building ties and bringing people together.

That would be what I add. Maybe others have additional comments. Thanks.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you so much, Belinda.

I would just add that if any Fellows out there are looking to do events in their community to combat misinformation, please think about utilizing the YALI network, YALI Checks campaign material. We have a great “Stop, Request, Verify” video vignette series available in French, English, and Portuguese. You can check that out.

With that, let's go to another recorded question.

Ojooluwa Olujide Ibiloye: My name is Ojooluwa Ibijoye, [Mandela Washington] Fellow from Nigeria. I am in the Leadership in Public Management track, Georgia State University.

My question: since the African Growth and Opportunity Act [AGOA] was enacted, the Act has been at the core of the U.S. economic policy and commercial relations with Africa, enhancing market access to the U.S. for qualifying sub-Saharan African countries. 21 years years after its enactment, how significant is AGOA to Africa’s integration into the global economy, and how is the U.S. empowering African countries to meet the set of conditions contained in the AGOA legislation?

Thank you.

Elizabeth Liu: Okay, thank you so much for that question on AGOA. Judd, over to you.

Judd Devermont: Yes, this is a great question and a hot topic here in Washington, DC as well as a hot topic in many African countries.

And I think we’ll just roll back the tape a little bit: the passage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act in 2000 was really a milestone for U.S.-Africa relationships. And it created unilateral trade

preferences, where a series of goods and services could be exported to the United States free of charge.

And it's quite unique. These kinds of trading arrangements don't exist in the rest of the world. And so there have been lots of benefits to AGOA. It's been important for many African economies, but I'm gonna say that there's a couple things that we have to think about as we go forward.

First, you may be familiar that the Act does expire in 2025. They may renew it, but perhaps it's time to think differently. Some countries don't use it as effectively, as much as it should be used. Some important services and other goods aren't incorporated in AGOA.

But the world is changing, right? I think Silas mentioned the continental free trade agreement area, and this is an incredibly important initiative. The United States has an FTA [Free Trade Agreement] with Morocco, and the negotiations started in the previous administration, [and] with Kenya, around the free-trade area.

And so I really think that we all need to have a conversation together about, what is the future of U.S. trade relations with Africa? How does something like AGOA in some countries remain in place, and some countries graduate out of it? Is there a space between AGOA and an FTA? Because not every country will make it to an FTA level--and by the way it takes a very long time to negotiate an FTA. You probably don't want to wait that long. How is that going to work with the CFTA? And how do we talk about what we, the U.S, are doing in terms of our trade relationships compared to what the Europeans are doing, or the Chinese are doing? It doesn't all work well together, and it may be not always in the best interest of our country or your countries.

So I think it's been an incredible milestone for U.S. policy. Every administration, including the Trump Administration, really did embrace AGOA. But right now, there's the opportunity to have a great conversation about how do we go forward, how do we use new tools like the DFC, the Development Finance Corporation? How do we leverage a new--I'm going to use Belinda's word--reignited Prosper Africa and the tools that offers?

But share your thoughts--talk to your embassy, talk to your friends, talk to us, talk to Liz. Where do you think AGOA needs to go in the future? Because it's so important that we have your input now as we think to the future.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you, Judd. Really appreciate that. Silas, anything to share from the A.U.'s perspective?

Silas Ngahane: Thank you, Liz. Definitely. I think, as mentioned earlier by Judd, I think AGOA needs to be fit for purpose. In the sense that the African Union has welcomed African featured areas, African contained and fitted areas, and now that's the new African market that we are developing and establishing to boost inter-Africa trade.

So looking at how trade relations with other countries like the U.S., and the EU, and other partners have been very important over the years. But I would like to mention that the U.S. has been a very long-standing partner on trade and investment in Africa, and the U.S. government has been working tirelessly to really support African businesses to move their economies to the next level.

Through AGOA, and the general system of preferences have worked well for some countries and for some others it has not worked. I think there is a need to revamp the AGOA framework to fit into the new realities of how the African common market is really shaping itself, in terms of elements related to issues of rules of origin.

For instance, the protocol on copyright and all the other elements that are related to trade policies and the tariff barriers as well. So, we are looking at how those tariffs have also been impacting how the trade relations with Africa have also gone over the recent years, and because of the FTAs as well. We are really eager in this new platform to work with the U.S. Government to really shape up how these trade relationships would work.

And our internal engagement with the U.S. Government, the U.S. mission to the African Union, there's a lot of interest. And as you all know, there is a bipartisan consensus on trade and investment for Africa. It's at the center stage of how the U.S. Government is really committing and engaging to support African businesses to grow.

And we hope that through a possible review or revisiting of AGOA framework that is expiring by 2025-- whether it's extended or not, we'll see a new baby that will definitely continue to support African economies to mature, not only in trade but also investments that will help those economies to mature to be able to play at the same level and at the international level.

Thank you. Over to you, Liz.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you so much, Silas. Really appreciate that. Judd also gave you kudos in the chat for such a great answer.

Next, I want to go to a question from an alumna named Ska from Zimbabwe. She asks, “how can climate change be integrated into the culture of business across the globe without prejudicing the economies that are still developing, as the balance of scale is tilted against developing countries and women, increasing both the gender gap and the developmental gap?”

Belinda, let’s go to you.

Belinda Jackson Ferrier: Sure, I think that when we look at climate change, and obviously the role of the business community is going to be critical in having successful outcomes.

I think climate change and its impacts are so localized that it's difficult to think about it in terms of simply global scale, but I would offer that serious conversations have to be had. As a community, we have to have serious conversations about how are we not only providing opportunities for businesses to be involved in that discussion, but how are we also providing the infrastructure for them to be able to act on that. And making sure that we have all of the right stakeholders at the table in any particular locality to ensure that we have the right interests, and the right priorities at play.

And so I’ll use the example of a country that I lived in, in which there were women who wanted to collect aluminum goods to recycle, and to use that as the basis of a business. But there wasn’t what was needed in that country to recycle those goods. We need to find better ways to help get women and groups like that space at the table to be able to talk with development partners, and with governments about what’s needed, about understanding what’s impacting communities, and ensuring that we have a roadmap forward.

So I think that’s a complex issue. It’s one that is an ongoing conversation, and one that we are engaged in. But it’s one that’s still developing, in my view.

I will pass it to the others, in case they have comments. Thank you.

Elizabeth Liu: Silas, I know you have a background in sustainable development. Do you have anything to add here?

Silas Ngahane: Thank you, Liz. I think, as Belinda said, we need to even always look at the gender dimension to some of the issues that we are facing in developing countries, and how women and

youth are bringing radical change to those challenges we are facing in terms of climate change on the continent.

I would like to add to the fact that climate change has become a peace & security issue on the continent, it has become a human rights issue on the continent. And this has to be dealt with with all of the necessary capabilities we have on the continent. If you go back to the earlier conversation we had in terms of eradicating violent extremism, like in the Sahel, as one of our fellows asked a question--we also need to understand that at the regional level, as Judd was recommending, that we need to reach out to those regional economic communities that are existant in different parts of Africa.

Because, the African Union has developed, with the support of the U.S. mission, national action plans, regional action plans on women, peace, & security, for instance, to support efforts to eradicate violent extremism. We have various strategies on the continent, as well, in terms of mitigating the impact of climate change and trying to see how young people can actually also be more engaged. It's important that, on the national level, we have support that's also coming from the government, because issues of climate change need policy change as well, to be able to really see transformation on the ground.

As Belinda was mentioning, the example--we cannot really mitigate challenges related to climate change if we don't have the right policies and infrastructure. If the lady wants to transform the material into recyclable output at the end of the day, we need the radical policy change and the support. Either through the government, or civil society and international partners. And we are happy to see the U.S. always committing to support around the government facilities those individuals who are taking the commitments to the next level to support efforts.

And sometimes, in the area of policies, those efforts are the ones leading as well to the formulation of policies.

I will end there. Thank you.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you so much, Silas.

Our next question comes from Ali, from Comoros. He asks, "I know that the U.S. is doing a great job in Africa, but is the best way our government can be working closely with the U.S. government to bring their technology in Africa, without barriers?"

Judd, let's go to you for this one.

Judd Devermont: This is a really important question, because I think many of us would agree that unlocking African economies, having open and transparent government means that you have to have accessible access to technology.

And so I would think about it in two ways with respect to how your government works on these issues with the United States, and one would be in terms of infrastructure, and the other one would be in terms of laws.

We know that there are some infrastructure limitations in terms of high volume and high speed internet access. And it does make African data very expensive. It's actually one of the most expensive in the world, in relative terms. Not enough towers, not enough C-cables, not enough of the kind of guts that you need to make this work.

And what I would say here is that you want to be able to entice lots of investment, and you want to make sure that your investments and the partners that you have don't scare away other customers. And let's just be frank that the Chinese investments are a deterrent for many American companies. There are legitimate concerns about Wawe, and ZTE, and the way in which they operate.

And so I am not suggesting anyone take or not take from certain countries; I would actually argue that you need to have a more proactive position. What are the things that your government demands from external partners in terms of transparency, standards, protections--those are the things that are really important to be consistent, and to make sure that none of your foreign investors providing infrastructure are doing things in a way that would discourage others, be discriminatory, would undercut the ability to do their jobs effectively without fear of having expropriation of private information. And those are some of the

infrastructure challenges that I think governments could do a better job, in terms of being clear about what are their conditions for any sort of foreign partnerships.

And then there's laws, and what we just saw in Nigeria with pulling down Twitter, or some of the laws in many countries, including in Zambia around Cyber, that are clearly not in the best interest of the public. They dampen investment, and they dampen the ability to communicate. And so there are a number of things they could do with laws to ensure that there is freedom of speech. Yes, we have to work on disinformation, but bending the internet in ways that just help an incumbent government is not the way forward.

And I have been thinking a lot lately about how many of your countries don't have internet during an election. There isn't a way to transparently report out what is happening, so internet shutdowns and making sure the cyber laws are right, and not knocking off social media just because your government doesn't like what people are saying on it.

And then this conversation about data localization, which many governments have adopted, which are really difficult for American companies to invest in, if there's these data localization laws.

So hard infrastructure, soft infrastructure, but I think those are the ways governments can work with the U.S. Government to encourage more investment and really unlock this important sector.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you so much, Judd.

Silas, is there anything that you wanted to add to that?

Silas Ngahane: Just a couple of things, Liz.

I think there are different ways to work with the U.S. in terms of unlocking the potential for digitalization and other challenges. And I would like to reiterate again--the U.S. has been there for decades now, supporting African countries in shipping some of our digital strategies in terms of cyber criminality, broadband access, and many of those.

It's important that, if we are really looking up to be international players, we need to really accept the fact that we need to step up our game on the continent to be able to meet international standards, and to be able to compete. Economic growth is about how much we harness and leverage on digital technology, and we know the U.S. has the capabilities to really support all of these efforts to come to fruition.

We have partners that are--also in the same field, we have other countries as well, but we need a more collaborative approach in terms of policies, as Judd said, and laws that are not discouraging policies. That will rather attract the best of the best to do what is right for the continent.

And as a government, we need to foresee, in the next decades, what we need as countries, so that we're not going to have to repeat what other countries and other parts of the world have faced as

challenges, but we can actually leverage on the achievement and the successes that the U.S. has gained over the years and decades on combating issues of cyber criminality and step up our game with this new era of digitalization.

Thank you.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you, Silas.

I'm going to ask the last question, and give everyone an opportunity to respond, and please give any final remarks that you have. And Silas, this is going to go to you first, because it's really a question for you coming from Otense in South Africa. "How can we as Fellows utilize the African Union Commission as a platform to influence trade policy and conditionality that come with foreign aid and impacting on the African economy in its totality?"

Silas Ngahane: Thank you Otense from South Africa.

I believe that being part of the YALI Fellowship is already a great step ahead of many. And as we were discussing earlier we have this issue of disinformation, while as well having the issue of lack of access to information. So, it's important to look at how the African Union policies have been formulated over the years, and to be able to leverage on the continental free trade area.

The new headquarters, located in Accra, in Ghana. It's important to look at the protocols, and all the opportunities that this market offers. And as entrepreneurs, or businesses, I would really encourage you to explore all the avenues by looking at the information we put out on the African Union website that could allow you to really take advantage of those new opportunities that are being provided. Mostly for the young generation, that we really want to empower on the continent today.

We will have an African continental free trade area that will look at boosting intra-Africa trade. So, the idea is to really support African businesses to trade amongst each other. So, it's a new thing for the continent and it's very enthusiastic. The leaders of the continent are really proud of this project, and we hope that the people of the continent are really proud of this project. And we hope that the people of the continent will really take advantage of this new African market.

Thank you, Liz. And thank you, Otense, for the question.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you so much. Judd, over to you.

Judd Devermont: Thanks for this question.

The answer is pretty simple: share what you believe should be the future of our trade relations, the future of our bilateral and multilateral relations. One of the things I'm most proud of as a U.S. citizen is that we are a country of debate, of deliberation, of arguments, of refinement over time. And our policies will not be as effective, both for U.S. interests and African interests, if there isn't a conversation about it. Civil, but it can be heated.

And as a YALI fellow, you really have a place of privilege to communicate amongst yourselves and your network: with the people that you have met here in the United States, and when you go back home and lay out your framework for what the relationship should be, what the state of the trade should be, or whatever the issue du jour is. I think the more that we hear from Fellow friends on the continent, the better our policies will be.

And that's where I want to end my remarks. We are in a unique moment here with a lot of opportunity. You've got an administration that wants to retain the best of U.S. policy of the past three decades, but is eager to do new things as well, about to capitalize on a moment in reflection of the Covid-19 crisis and some of the other challenges, like climate change. And I believe that they want to hear your thoughts to construct better policy. Share, write, put out your affirmative agenda for U.S.-African relations, and I think you'd get a fair hearing.

Thank you so much.

Elizabeth Liu: Thank you, Judd.

Belinda, any final thoughts?

Belinda Jackson Ferrier: Yeah, thank you.

Similar to Judd, I would offer that we are in a moment where we have an opportunity to create generational change. Many of us have had considerable difficulty and struggles during the past year, during the pandemic--even tragedy. And we should use this opportunity, as the world rethinks our

relationships, as we rethink our way of doing business, as we rethink education and the delivery of health systems, we have an opportunity to use our platforms and our voices to be a part of coming out of this great tragedy into something positive that will be lasting, and will strengthen the good things of what we had in the past.

And so, I think that you all have an enormous opportunity here to use this [Mandela Washington] Fellowship and the relationships and networks that you're building through the Fellowship to really build something strong that can truly make a difference. And so I look forward to seeing what you create, and what comes out of this, and all of the things that you achieve in the months and years ahead.

So thank you for this opportunity to engage with all of you.

Elizabeth Liu: Absolutely. Thank you, Belinda. Thank you to all of our panelists here today. We had a great conversation and we covered a lot of ground, from trade, to the Sahel, gender gap, misinformation, climate change, health policy--we really covered a lot. So, thank you so much.

And truly, YALI's programs, every single one of them--the Fellowship, the Regional Leadership Centers, and the YALI Network, which I hope you join if you haven't already--they support any and all U.S. policy goals. YALI promotes effective public administration, networks that connect people, creates conditions for peace, prosperity, and security across the continent, and investment opportunities for U.S. businesses.

But what really, really makes YALI special, as we have heard from other speakers today, is you. You are Africa's young leaders, you are the future of the world, and what I love about YALI is that you really embody the spirit of servant leadership. And that, to me, is YALI's soul, and honors Nelson Mandela's legacy. I never get tired of watching that video they show in the beginning, it always makes me cry a little bit.

And in my household, my favorite Nelson Mandela quote is that "it always seems impossible until it's done." I love to use that on my kids when they don't want to clean up, or they're learning a new skill, or what have you. And so they know that quote well, and what I've seen over and over again is that that's what the Fellows demonstrate day in and day out.

This has been a dark time for a lot of people, and I've been sitting in my basement for almost this entire assignment, but it has been the best assignment I've ever had, because I've had a chance to be



inspired by, and to engage with you each and every day. So thank you for everything that you do, and please enjoy the rest of the Summit.