Last week we celebrated the 8th anniversary of the African Risk Capacity Group and reminisced on all the milestones we have achieved within such a short space of time. It’s been said that culture is the most important lever in every institution, which drives both behaviour and work ethics. My experience of ARC within the past three months is strongly convincing of a purpose-driven organisation with an entrenched culture of passion, commitment, diligence, team spirit, and excellence.

Early in September, we embarked on what we then called the ‘GDG 100-Days Plan’ which quickly evolved into the Group’s 100 Days Plan as it required all hands-on-deck to deliver on an ambitious set of key indicators. With the enthusiastic collaboration of everyone, we outlined burning themes and committed to deliver on agreed key activities that would ensure we streamline and accelerate our efforts towards achieving our Strategic Objective in a fully integrated way. Most importantly, it ensured that ARC remains an agile and adaptive institution within the changing landscape. The 100-Days Plan was challenging, especially considering the COVID19-imposed constraints that have driven productivity level of most organisations below sustainability thresholds. But we have aggressively pursued the delivery of the Plan and have made significant traction.

Perhaps, no other goal within the 100 Days plan has yet tasked us more than the ‘Strategy Refresh’ exercise. As we leveraged on all resources at our disposal, set and surmounted very tight deadlines and deployed new conferencing technology platforms to ensure full, collaborative and effective participation of the team, albeit virtual. The innovation, professionalism, inclusiveness and team spirit for which ARC is synonymous became manifest and we ultimately produced a fully integrated refreshed Group Strategy document which bears the fingerprints of every one of us.

On Monday, November 30, Lesley and I had the singular opportunity to present the 2020-2024 ARC Group Refreshed Strategy to the Strategic Oversight Committee (SOC). The presentation to the SOC Directors was concise and comprehensive, and prior in-depth preparation with Senior Management truly paid off, as the Group Refreshed Strategy was very positively received and unanimously endorsed by the committee, with extended commendations. We were deeply gratified, but the real kudos goes to everyone in the Group. As it’s said, the “bridge between GOOD and EXCELLENT is preparation.”

The Refreshed Group Strategy is both a map and a compass to purposefully guide our work as we continue to assist African governments in building resilience through improving their adaptation and mitigation capacities. Our mission to ensure that Member States provide a timely and more efficient risk response to their vulnerable communities in the face of natural disasters is more urgent now as most countries face serious economic difficulty as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

We are mindful of the huge tasks ahead of us as we maintain focus on remaining the ‘Partner of Choice’ in disaster risk management and financing on the continent. Steadily, we are leveraging on the obstacles as steppingstones to our goals. Despite the pandemic, the Group cohesion is flourishing; and we have signed more policies this year than ever before. Going forward, we are accelerating efforts to help countries further strengthen their disaster risk management systems. Also, we are diversifying our product offerings, exploring mutual collaborations with relevant private sector entities to incorporate micro-meso insurance products towards covering individual farmer groups. Most importantly, we are boosting efforts to strengthen existing partnerships and enlist other technical and financial actors in our quest to provide premium financing for our Member States.

Yes, we are living in dire times, but looking back to what we have been able to achieve within such a short time, I believe that we are on course to strengthening Africa’s capacities to protect the food security and livelihoods of her vulnerable populations.

With our transformational culture, we will not relent until every AU Member State has access to innovative financing channels for a rapid and predictable response when climate and natural disaster strikes.

Ibrahima Cheikh Diong, UN ASG and ARC Group Director General
The Republic of Zambia became the 33rd member state of African Risk Capacity in January 2016 and subsequently signed an MoU in October 2018. This enabled the country to participate in the capacity building programmes of ARC as well as the identification of priority areas for collaboration in the country’s disaster risk management and financing framework.

In January 2020, Zambia renewed the MoU based on the value of technical collaboration with ARC. It is therefore heartening that after two years of uninterrupted partnership, Zambia has decided to join the ARC drought risk pool with a premium of $1m, funded by the Government of Zambia and supported by the German Government.

Going forward, the ARC programme in the country aims to further consolidate the gains of pool participation by strengthening capacity building through the ARC rangeland model. Additionally, given that Zambia is prone to high risk of flood, ARC has plans to make its Floods product, currently in final stages of development, available to the country once it is ready.

Who would have thought that at the blink of an eye, the world would change so drastically? The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about uncertainty, fear and confusion as everyone scrambled to grasp what was soon to become the “new normal”. Was it the beginning of the end of the world? What would become of our families, our jobs, our kids in school, etc.?

With the imposed social distancing and limited face-to-face interaction, work disruptions were imminent, and it became all about survival. The few lucky organisations that could still operate were forced to reorganise and find new ways of working, and virtual working became a new reality. For a moment, most struggled as the challenges of using new technologies set in. Suddenly, meetings moved into the virtual space and within a very short time, our homes had to be adjusted to accommodate office needs.

Bringing it closer to home, for ARC, the strength of human resilience was on display. The teams were able to quickly find their feet and consider new ways of delivering on the ARC programme. Before we knew it, people started appreciating the advantages of this new way of working. The opportunity to work in the comfort of one’s own home was an exciting one. This period became family or personal time, a welcome break from challenges of commuting to work, relief from being confined to an office, a time to start a new hobby, a moment of self-reflection and a time for personal care. Whatever the focus was, it was a time to appreciate simply being alive and healthy.

All that was fun until the nostalgia of it all set in. The home became too small for those with families, or too quiet for those locked down alone. As homes became offices and classrooms, parents became teachers and entertainers, and accommodating the whole household’s demands became a balancing act and demanded skill and discipline. Staying motivated was a challenge as the pressures of a work, school and life balance took their toll.

With restrictions relaxed and economies starting to open up, there is an immense appreciation for life and a keenness to move forward. Like any other organisation, the ARC Group is excited about the future and its work in contributing towards disaster risk management and improving resilience in Africa. The coronavirus has confirmed the need for a solid virtual working strategy to ensure that the ARC programme is not disrupted by and changes in the operating environment. Focus now moves towards finding a suitable solution to ensure communication between ARC and its partners is efficient.

# NEW NORMAL
The Group DG along with the CEO of ARC Ltd, Lesley Ndlovu, met with Malawi Finance Minister

On December 2nd, as a follow-up of Malawi returning back to the pool, the ARC Group Director General and UN ASG, Ibrahima Cheikh Diong, had a virtual meeting with Honorable Felix Lafiel Mlusu, Minister of Finance, Republic of Malawi to discuss how the ARC Group can better support the implementation of Malawi National Disaster Strategy.

The Group DG along with the CEO of ARC Ltd shared insights on the ongoing governance reforms within ARC Group to better serve the needs of its Member States, especially in products diversification, extension of coverage to non-sovereign entities in the region and avenues for premium support.

The ARC Group will continue to leverage on its continental status, expertise and robust partnerships to provide technical assistance and premium support to the Government of Malawi. Both parties discussed additional areas of focus, including strengthening the country’s capacity for early warning and disaster risk preparedness among other things.

Introductory Meeting between ARC Group DG and African Union Commissioner for Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA)

On November 27th, the ARC Group Director General and UN ASG, Ibrahima Cheikh Diong, had an introductory meeting with H.E. Amb. Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, African Union Commissioner for Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA).

The meeting was an opportunity for the GDG to express gratitude to the H.E. Amb. Sacko for the valuable support and mutually beneficial relationship between the DREA and ARC. Importantly, the exchanges enabled a brief review of current collaborations between the AU and the ARC Group, and charted the way forward on key areas for a more entrenched partnership, including advocacy, resource mobilisation, premium support for Member States and communication.

ARC Ltd (an affiliate of the ARC Group) Board Retreat

ARC Limited, as part of its extended orientation and induction process, will be holding a ‘Board Induction Retreat’ for the 5 new Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) appointed earlier in the year. Agenda discussions are expected to cover Governance matters; the role of Limited in the achievement of the Group’s strategic objectives and other pertinent issues to enable the NEDs better appreciate their role in the ARC business ecosystem.

COMING UP

- 4th InsurResilience Global Partnership Forum, December 7, 2020. The GDG will participate in the High Level Event: "From strategy to implementation – deliverables on the road to Vision 2025”.

- A virtual Joint Meeting of the ARC Group Board will be held on Friday, December 11, 2020. A valediction will be held for the Agency Board Chairperson, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who would be chairing her last session after serving the institution for 8 years.

- 3rd Africa Galien Forum on December 10, 2020. The GDG will be co-chairing a high-level panel on “Multisectoral and Community Participation: Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations”.

(Top to bottom): Hon. Felix Lafiel Mlusu (Malawian Minister of Finance), Ibrahima Cheikh Diong (ARC Group DG) and Lesley Ndlovu (ARC Ltd CEO)