We are fast moving towards the end of a year that has changed the world and disrupted our lives, a year when our resolutions and ambitions have been challenged by the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. We often had to improvise in the face of a disease which was largely unknown, one to which our technology and medical systems have struggled to keep up with. However, 2020 has shown us how crucial notions like social cohesion and resilience are for humankind. Without them, we would never have been able to stand up to the often difficult and unexpected situations that have challenged the status quo and marked our lives this year.

This pandemic has also brought to light the real needs and challenges of our century. If anything, one of the greatest lessons has been the importance of being able to better anticipate and manage epidemic outbreaks and the need for increased solidarity between nations. I am hopeful that we have learnt our lessons from this pandemic and will be much more prepared in the future.

It has now been more than 3 months since my appointment as the ARC Group Director General and from the onset, I understood how great and noble the mission of our organisation is, particularly during these uncertain times. I have also been proud to witness the unwavering commitment of all ARC staff and their dedication towards serving the needs of our Member States. Thank you for your efforts!

Over the past few months, we have embarked on what we have called the “Group’s 100-day plan”, an ambitious programme with set key activities that will enable our institution to achieve its strategic objectives in an integrated manner. This programme will not only allow us to optimally reposition our organisation in the Disaster Risk Management and Financing space in Africa but will also improve our capacity to adapt to a changing landscape.

One of the essential components of this “Group’s 100-day plan” has been the refreshed Group Strategy 2020-2024, to which we have all contributed. I am excited that this refreshed strategy has been commended and endorsed by the Strategic Oversight Committee (SOC) as well as by the Board of Directors of the ARC Group. This strategy will be the compass that will guide our institution over the next years.

I would also like to sincerely thank our past and present partners (Canada, France, USA, UK, EU, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, IFAD, WFP, Rockefeller and the AfDB) and AU-DIC for their unwavering support. 2020 has compelled us to use new ways of working together, albeit virtually. Nonetheless, our ambition to become the “partner of choice” in the Disaster Risk Management field in Africa remains the same and our commitment to improve Africa’s resilience continues to drive our work.

Among the positive outcomes of our partnerships this year, let me mention the Euros 19 million provided by the German Government through BMZ / KfW to support insurance premiums for ARC Member States for the 2020/2021 agricultural seasons, and the additional grant from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (FDFA) of USD $ 2 million to be exclusively used for premium support to vulnerable Member States for the uptake of ARC’s first Outbreaks & Epidemics product. This week, our institution has also just signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD) which will enable us to deliver comprehensive climate-linked disasters risk management programmes in order to develop Africa’s agriculture sector and increase food security for rural communities in this sector.

Dear colleagues, as 2021 is just around the corner, our institution is undertaking new and innovative initiatives that will take the organisation to new heights. I remain convinced that together, we will meet the challenges that lie ahead.

I wish you and your families a great festive season and a happy new year. I am grateful for your commitment and dedication, despite the difficult circumstances. My sincere gratitude also goes to Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who was Board Chairperson of the ARC Group for 8 years and whose leadership has greatly contributed to what our institution is today. She will be greatly missed but I remain confident that she will always be an ARC Ambassador wherever she will be.

Keep safe and see you next year!

Ibrahima Cheikh Diong, UN-ASG and ARC Group Director General
It is a bitter sweet moment for the ARC Group to bid farewell to Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as she moves on to the world stage. As a woman who commands admiration wherever she goes, her contribution to the organisation has been instrumental in shaping the organisation. Her leadership, her charisma and her commitment to Africa and its people are unparalleled. Honored on number of occasions for her exemplary career, she was recently named this year’s “African of the Year” by Forbes Africa magazine.

Indeed, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala will be dearly missed by the ARC Group, but we are comforted by the fact that she will continue to be an ambassador for the organisation and its cause. About 17 years ago, she became the longest-serving Finance Minister and Prime Minister of Foreign Affairs in Nigeria, a country where women rarely reach these levels of responsibility. Thanks to her excellent work and her sense of responsibility, Dr Ngozi has raised the standards of good governance in Africa. “ARC was very fortunate to have a leader of such caliber as Dr. Ngozi. I am convinced that wherever she goes, she will raise the flag high and be a first-class ambassador for our institution,” emphasised Mr. Birama B. Sidibe, ARC Agency Board Member.

Dr. Ngozi’s journey with ARC dates back 2013 when she was appointed as Chairperson of the African Risk Capacity Agency Governing Board. From the very beginning, she instilled a passion to serve Africa within the institution and has been at the forefront of several reforms that have not only expanded ARC’s influence in Africa but have also strengthened the credibility of the institution with policy makers and Member States. In the words of Nalan Yuksel, Canada Embassy in Ethiopia, “On behalf of the partners, it’s been amazing to watch the evolution of ARC under the leadership of Dr. Ngozi. We wanted to highlight the fact that ARC’s success can be attributed to your contribution, and your collaborative and welcoming nature”.

When it came to “getting her hands dirty” and working to meet challenges that many thought insurmountable, Dr. Ngozi has always led the way. Her sheer tenacity and resolve served to infuse courage and optimism within the ARC Group. A case in point is when she wrote a letter to our stakeholders to appeal for contributions of premium finance as many of our Member States struggled to afford paying for premiums due to conflicting priorities during the difficulty time of COVID-19 this year. This resulted in the Euros 19 million contribution from BMZ/KfW to support insurance premiums for ARC Member States for the 2020/2021 agricultural seasons. This victory, among many others, undoubtedly bears the imprint of Dr. Ngozi. “We are very fortunate to have had you lay the foundations for this organisation Dr. Ngozi. Now the responsibility lies with us to ensure that we build on your legacy and make you proud of the institution that you have injected a lot of your energy into,” echoed UN-ASG and ARC Group Director-General, Ibrahima C. Diong.

“I take this opportunity to honour this great African woman. Today, we are saluting what she has done for ARC as she became the face of the organisation. I just want to see how best she can continue to be a part of ARC as I don’t think we should ever let her go.” These are the words of Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, ARC Ltd Board Chair. The African Risk Capacity Group is truly grateful and indebted to this wonderful African woman for her 8 years of service. Her journey with the institution has been a great source of encouragement and has inspired the Group to always strive to do better to support Member States and change the lives of our beneficiaries across the continent.

In the words of Mr. Jürgen Meisch, ARC Ltd Board Member, during Dr. Ngozi’s final Board meeting, “I don’t say this very often, but I think you’ve probably been wisest person I have met in my professional life”. The ARC Group shares the same sentiments and from the bottom of our hearts, thank you Dr. Ngozi! You will forever be in our hearts.
Since embarking on the Governance Reform process in 2019, much progress has been made towards the creation of a unified governance structure that will best support the ARC Group’s obligations to Member States and reposition the organisation as a partner of choice in the Disaster Risk Management and Financing space. The OneARC programme, a name adopted to represent the Governance Reform process to internal stakeholders, has come to be synonymous with a commitment towards one Group vision, transparency and well-managed change within the ARC Group. The work done thus far has been commendable to say the least, all thanks to the professional guidance of KnowHouse, a professional consultancy firm which is working with the ARC Group to realise this dream. This has been their experience.

It’s unlikely that people will reflect on 2020 as an easy year.

Our experience of the OneARC programme was to participate in a fascinating organisational journey; an initial focus on structural and legal frameworks and progressing to a focus on leadership, culture and the strategic identity of the organisation.

The process set off with an initial focus on a number of connected projects towards the achievement of this goal. We achieved the creation of the OneARC workgroup, the blueprint design, programme branding and communication, and the amendment and ratification of the Treaty, and the successful establishment of the Strategy Oversight Committee.

The Change Champion structure was created as one of the enablers of change within ARC. This structure was vital in the dissemination of information and decisions flowing from the programme to all ARC internal stakeholders.

On the leadership side, we started with the departure of the Ltd CEO as well as the ARC Agency Director General; followed by facilitating the onboarding of the newly appointed Ltd CEO, Lesley Ndlovu and ARC Group Director General, Ibrahima Cheikh Diong. The Listening Tour was a well-managed transitional dialogue between the incoming Group Director General, members of the organisation and stakeholders including Board Members and Partners. A number of new ARC Ltd Board members were also appointed during this time.

The recurring theme of our programme experience is the confluence of a set of changes in major aspects of the organisation, formal Treaty changes, changes in top leadership, changes in Board members and committees and of course the impact of the pandemic. Not often have we had the opportunity to work with an organisation where so much change occurred at the same time and this had kept us on our toes.

The organisation had to deal with the pandemic’s impact on strategy while pushing to stay on track with the implementation of the OneARC programme. The strategy refresh process has been a huge success. In a very short space of time, the ARC Group Strategy 2020 - 2024 was reviewed, refreshed and adopted. The work of developing a OneARC culture was also initiated with a culture survey and review by the organisation.
“2020 was supposed to be a year of soaring new heights – the best year yet. What I didn’t foresee was a global pandemic that was going to change everything. Personally, the measures imposed to contain the ongoing pandemic like the lockdowns and travel restrictions came with a lot of strain, including not being able to be with loved ones. On the other hand, technology has aided a bit with that, challenging and changing the way we engage, celebrate and care for each other. Professionally, 2020 has been both tasking and rewarding. Adjusting to working from home with a family was not the easiest, however, it afforded us the opportunity to be closer with the immediate family. The impact of the work that we are involved in has also become more urgent, more important, more necessary as we seek the greater good for all on the African continent. Now that 2020 is coming to a close, I can see that despite the challenges, difficulties and new norm, 2020 was a necessary agent in activating purpose and drawing me closer to myself which in turn would make this the best year yet, just a different kind of best.”

(Babatunde Iyanda, Partnerships and AU Protocol Officer/ARC)

“2020 was a peculiar year to say the least. It has helped me step out of my comfort zone both personally and professionally, learning new ways and adapting. Battling COVID-19, doing virtual missions, holding remote workshops with the Technical Working Groups, there was a weird sense of distance that technology could not fill. However, we made it work. The distance did not separate us. As we end the year in the most painful and uncertain way, I feel positive and optimistic as I see some sort of silver-lining: we end 2020 more resilient and thankful.”

(Aissata Lam, Country Engagement Manager, West and Central Africa/ARC)

“Working from home has given me the opportunity to spend much needed time with family. It’s amazing what that has done to my spirit. Given the threat of the coronavirus, I am most grateful for the gift of life and a chance to contribute towards building Africa’s resilience to disaster risks.”

(Ropafadzo Makusha, Programme Assistant/ARC)

“This will definitely be remembered as the year where every single individual and community have been directly or indirectly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This ongoing pandemic raised awareness on the importance of disaster scenario planning for high-consequence infectious disease outbreaks and other emerging risks like climate change. 2020 was the “new normal” way of living with the virus; to bring this pandemic to an end, we all have an important role to play to keep ourselves and others safe from the coronavirus and assist the most vulnerable people.”

(Amadou Bah, Public Health and Country Liaison Officer, Outbreaks and Epidemics (O&E)/ARC)

“In the last few months of 2020, we have experienced an unprecedented change in our lifestyle due to COVID-19. I remember at the beginning of March when my 5-year-old son told me: ‘Daddy, our school is closed because of the Conora Venus’. We all laughed at this new name of the virus invented by my son without knowing that a new way of life would slowly but surely take hold. Sadly, we have regularly seen job losses everywhere, business closures, graduation cancellations, weddings and vacations postponed etc. Familiar routines involving work, school, exercise and weekend hobbies have all been dropped to comply with health measures. Who would have thought that toilet paper could become as precious as gold! The stress has therefore intensified and the uncertainty on the horizon has increased. Professionally, Zoom and Teams meetings have become a new normal. We had to reorganise ourselves to keep the smile, the joy of living and above all, the hope of a better future.”

(Charles Serele, Project Manager, Tropical Cyclone/ARC)

**NEWS FLASH**

Madagascar takes out the first parametric tropical cyclone risk insurance product in Africa

This week, Madagascar became the first country in East and Southern Africa (ESA) region to take out the ARC tropical cyclone parametric insurance coverage, thanks to the KfW premium support for the 2020-2021 season. Madagascar’s participation will complement government efforts towards reducing the impacts of climate change and weather variability on the most vulnerable populations.

Click here to watch (in French)
IFAD VP, Mr Dominik Ziller & the ARC Group DG & UN-ASG, Mr Ibrahima Cheikh Diong, have officially formalised on December 16th, the partnership between the two organisations through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which will establish a framework for collaboration to better support Africa’s smallholder farmers. Through technical expertise, capacity building and resource mobilisation, IFAD and ARC will seek to deliver comprehensive climate-linked disasters risk management programmes in order to develop Africa’s agriculture sector and increase the food security of the rural communities of this sector.

Meeting with H.E. Bineta Diop, African Union Special Envoy for Women

On December 14th, ARC Management team and the Head of the Gender Unit had very productive and constructive exchanges with H.E. Bineta Diop, African Union Special Envoy for Women and her team. The conversation focused on potential areas of collaboration, including sustained advocacy, research & development, training, resource mobilisation and knowledge management in regards to gender and Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in Africa.

The @ARC Editorial team wishes you a great festive season and a Happy New year!