



*The Voice Of Africa*

## CHAT WITH ANNE KABAGAME

Hi there, I'm Kemuel Van Der Puije, in this interview, meet Anne Kabagambe. In this podcast, we discuss the world banks perspectives on the pandemic and any future pandemic for that matter and how Africa has responded to the drastic change.

**Kemuel:** Welcome to the Voice of Africa TV and podcast. Today, we are pleased to have Ms. Anne Kabagambe join us. Ms. Anne Kabagambe is an executive director serving on the World Bank Group Boards of Directors. As one of 25 executive members, she carries out fiduciary functions and also represents 22 African countries. These countries stretch from West Africa to Eastern Africa, the Horn of Africa and southern Africa. In addition, Ms. Kabagambe serves on the Budget Committee, the Development Effectiveness Committee, the Pension Administration Committee and is the Co-Chair of the Board's Gender Working Group. Ms. Kabagambe is a national of Uganda. Before joining the World Bank, she served as Chief of Staff at the African Development Bank for ten years. Ms. Kabagambe, we're pleased to have you here. **Can you please tell us briefly about your background?**

**Anne:** Well, thank you very much for that kind introduction. I will start where you left off – that I am Ugandan – and I will add that, while I was born and spent my formative years in Uganda, I actually consider myself an African by my identity, values, character and experience. So I wanted to slightly reintroduce myself as an African who is also a global citizen by my work and experience. I like to consider the introduction of being from one country as something that we can stretch because, as I probably have mentioned, I spent 15 years in West Africa, in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, for example. I worked in North Africa for 11 years, in Tunisia. And of course, now I live here in Washington D.C. So yes, I was born in

Uganda, the Southwest part of Uganda to be exact, right next to the borders of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda and I spent my secondary school education in Uganda. Then, I moved to the United States for higher education and so you can understand why I insist on being first an African, second a global citizen and then a Ugandan, all of which I'm proud to be and associate with. With respect to my education, I spent my undergraduate years at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) – the UC system. Later, I moved to do a master's degree at Columbia University in New York City, and halfway through my career I undertook another set of studies and acquired a second master's degree at George Washington University, right here in Washington, D.C. I believe you referred to my years of service, which have mainly been in international development and in the finance space: in management at the African Development Bank and now, at the World Bank on the Executive Board side. I believe that covers my background for your esteemed audience, so I pass it back to you.

Kemuel: Thank you. So essentially you've been in the development field for quite some time and it just seems to be a natural calling to you.

Anne: It would appear so.

**Kemuel: The World Bank, like other organizations, must be responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Can you briefly tell us what the bank has done to help African countries?**

**Anne:** I'm very pleased that you are touching on this very important aspect of what we are living with right now. Maybe before I answer the question of what the World Bank is doing, let me just lightly touch on what's going on the African continent. The impact of this crisis, of course, cannot be underestimated and it's reflected in many aspects, but for sub-Saharan Africa, it's basically going to show the first recession in 25 years and the growth that we are estimating at the World Bank is that our economies are going to go down by almost 5.1%, if

you can imagine that. Of course, this is going to be increased by our lack of medical supplies, the shortage of tourism through the lack of travel facilities, a decrease in the remittances that have been going to most of our countries and, of course, there is a sharp drop in commodity prices, on which a lot of our countries depend. So, the picture from that side would not look very positive, but there is a slight good story to tell about the African continent, because at the beginning of the pandemic, back then in March and April, the narrative was that the African continent was going to have these almost apocalyptic scenarios, and what has happened as the months have gone by is that, in fact, the story looks more positive than we had expected. I wanted to just mention one of the reasons I believe this is so – most of the African governments were quick to follow the scientific guidelines and put in place aspects that would protect their populations.

Let me give you an example that I think illustrates the speed and the policymakers' decisions that have brought some positive results. Of course, the numbers are going up, but look at the population of the African continent, which is approximately 1.5 billion people, and compare it to the 540,000 reported cases of the virus across the world as of mid-July; about 12,000, almost 13,000 are from the African continent. However, compare that to Latin America, where the population is roughly half of that of the African continent: they already have cases as high as 2.9 million and their deaths are almost 130,000. My point is that before we get to what the World Bank has done, the African countries have done what I consider to be really commendable actions to cut down cases, to move on preparedness on responses and on recovery.

That was my first point and on this I would really like to commend the action by the governments, citizens and the private sector on the continent and now, if you will allow me, I will move on to what we at the World Bank did to help in this positive narrative that I have given. I'll continue by informing you – and I think you and most of your audience would know – of the World Bank's two basic missions: to reduce poverty figures all over the world and to increase the shared prosperity of the wealth that we have. In this aspect, when it came to the fact that we had this pandemic that visited us this year, the World Bank moved rapidly to

adjust the program that I just explained and focused on helping countries in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. We did that in three ways: the first way was to quickly save lives, therefore we provided a lot of resources – of course, money can never be enough but we tried to provide as much assistance to countries as we could. Just to give you an idea in terms of figures on this “saving lives and providing money for health”, between March and today [July 20<sup>th</sup>], the World Bank has disbursed 6.3 billion dollars for emergency health support, and this has been to 108 countries. As I mentioned, we are a global bank, so we help all countries and the reason this 108 is important is that it's a milestone because it actually has helped and covered 70% of the world's population. Now with respect to the countries I represent and sub-Saharan Africa, we have 33 countries that have enjoyed these resources; basically the resources go to the health ministry and help the local programs that each country has. That was the first part of what we were dealing with around March, April and towards May – trying to contain the spread of the virus and saving lives in almost all ends of the continent and the world. Now, the World Bank has started working to support the economic recovery of most of our countries in terms of saving livelihood, which means assessing how we can provide those people that have been affected by the lockdowns with resources. How can we preserve their jobs? How can we ensure that we can sustain business? Hopefully, we can create jobs as well. These are the interventions that we are right now involved in and hopefully we will have enough response from this second part – “saving livelihood and protecting the poor and the vulnerable” – then we will get to the last stage, which is “recovery resilience and the idea of building back better”.

I think that I should mention that on the African continent we have some countries that are in conflict or have some fragility that have been affected even more by the pandemic. So, as a final part of what the World Bank has been doing, on those ones we put forth a lot of effort to provide some money and right now we've provided one billion dollars to the African countries that we call fragile and conflict-affected states to help them with their health aspects. The World Bank also has another part that provides resources to the private sector; it's called IFC and I will end by saying that, for the private sector in the last five months, we've also tried to focus some money to African banks or other companies that can give and support

the small and medium companies. This is also another big chunk; we've been able to dispense about 3.5 billion dollars. Now I know that, for the audience, these figures really won't mean much, when we talk about billions, but what I would like to leave behind, because your question is about the response of an institution like the World Bank, is that back in March, we responded by committing that over the next 15 months, which is in June next year – 2021, we will work very hard to bring to bear and to put to the benefit of countries 160 billion dollars in addressing the pandemic.

**Kemuel:** Wow. Okay to your earlier statement, **couldn't one suggest that Africa's infrastructure or lack thereof played in how Africa receives the pandemic?**

**Anne K:** Thank you for that question. Let me illustrate my statement by giving you an example. When the pandemic was just beginning, which was around February, I travelled to five of my countries in Africa. This was during the last two weeks of February and the first week of March. When I arrived in Malawi, the team that met me at the airport was wearing masks – that's in February. When I went to Zambia, we were asked to wash your hands at the airport. In Zimbabwe, there were health records and interviews by a health worker. By the time I got to Nairobi, Kenya, they were taking temperatures, they were making us fill out forms. The first week of March, when I arrived in Entebbe, Uganda, all the airport personnel were wearing masks, and of course, temperatures were being taken. Now, I'm talking about the time that the pandemic had just started. I will probably not want to tell you my experience when I got back home to Washington D.C., at Dulles Airport, but you probably know that there was nothing like what I experienced in the five countries that I have just explained to you. So, my point is that the African countries moved with speed and diligence and followed the scientific guidelines way back, before other countries, dare I say, more developed countries, put these protocols in place.

**Kemuel:** Okay. That's much clearer now. Thank you for your clarification. **So, in your view, what could the World Bank or the world be doing better to respond to COVID-19 as well as any other future pandemic?**

**Anne K:** There are many areas that, I have to say, have been better responded to, however, my sense is that as we continue to struggle through the current pandemic, we have to completely rethink how future pandemics would look like and how we would respond to them. I just want to remind your audience that in the last 20 years – we actually haven't even gotten to 20 years – we have had five previous pandemics. We had SARS in 2002, H1N1 in 2009, MERS in 2012, for us in Africa, Ebola in 2014 and COVID-19 this year. So, there have been five pandemics in 18 years. And of course, it is true that the previous pandemics have not affected us so much, but maybe we were just lucky. So, as we move into the future and look at the experience of what we're going through, in my opinion, we want to make sure that we are prepared so that there is no closing of the entire global economy. I think that should be our objective, and how are we going to do that? I think the first thing is really to see how we can collaborate and coordinate towards future pandemics in a seamless manner. What is for sure is that there's going to be another pandemic. The question is how are we going to respond to it? So my call is for the countries and nations that have really been responding to this not as a global problem, but as a national problem – that's problem number one, because the moment you have a nation state approach we are all doomed, because the virus doesn't have any borders – it travels as quickly as passengers on airplanes. So, my hope and my call is that we are able to prepare now for the next pandemic and the best way, I believe, we might be able to do that is to see if we can set up a global fund or group, for lack of a better word, that is going to be working to get several things in place – they have to be able to create early warning signs so we know; they have to plan and mobilize the key players and these are international organizations, the private sector – which has been very quiet – and citizens like you and I. We must be able to find ways of setting up a global health infrastructure, not just for each country and we must be able to get all the intelligence, innovation and science to create things – like what we're doing today with vaccines, but do it

as a global family instead of each country on its own. So, for me, while I believe that we are moving towards solving this particular pandemic, we must be able to create a new thinking on how we shall handle the future pandemics so that we do not once again have to have lockdowns and close the global economy. I think that I would like to call on young people like you and others in the audience to start thinking about what it would take and what kind of input we also could provide from the African continent that would make the world have an insurance against yet another pandemic.

**Kemuel:** You just read my mind, Ms. Kabagambe. Essentially, what we're talking about is more so a people problem; it's not just a policy problem, and I think that as a people we have to look for the betterment of ourselves. We do need to brainstorm and think deeply about how we're going to handle the next pandemic. **As someone who has been in the development and financial fields for more than 30 years, what advice do you have for young Africans like me and others who may be interested in the field?**

**Anne K:** That's a really good question and it's very close to my heart because I strongly feel that this is an area that we don't have now - young people engaged in these global issues. And so, I would like to first start by hoping that there would be enough young men, and especially at the core of it, young *women*, that can join in this debate on how we could shape our world, in the development field and any other field! But, as I said, we can put our efforts locally, nationally or globally, so I want to invite your audience to look into contributing at a larger scale. Nelson Mandela's birthday was on Saturday July 18<sup>th</sup> and there was a conversation on his achievements, and there was a debate and somebody reminded young people, and this is my first ask, that Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in service to his nation and his people and that every year on July 18<sup>th</sup>, we are all called to provide 67 minutes – they are not asking for 67 years – towards the service of your community or your nation or on an international level. 67 minutes. So I want to just challenge the young people in your audience to remember to provide service to their communities when they can and, if they

can, they should remember the 67 minutes. Now, if you are able to provide 67 minutes, continue to strive to be a better person in service to yourself and your community.

The first thing that I would say to respond to your question would be that, for the young people listening to me, there is no substitute for hard work. That does not even require repeating. There are no shortcuts; you have to put in the hard work, and that's why I started with the 67 minutes of service. Hard work and service would be my first advice.

The second one, which I see as an important part of being in the global sector, the national sector, policymaking or anything else that you wish to do, is to determine what kind of education you want to aspire to and this will depend on various things: what's available, what you're interested in, your abilities. But again, my own personal experience has been that there's really no substitute for a good education. I believe I told you in my introduction that midway in my career, I decided to go back to school. So, I would advocate for education, and there's a whole range of education, whether it is university or tertiary education or having some skills; simply acquiring education.

Then, I think the final one is, because of the environment that we live in as African people, which has been really well illustrated by these recent demonstrations on Black Lives Matter, is to note that there are always going to be obstacles. My advice, and almost a request, is that you develop a certain level of resilience that does not stop you from doing what you've chosen to do. And resilience comes in many ways, but I think the gist of resilience would be this: do not give up on what you've decided you want to do.

I want to end with my personal favorite soft skills: even if you have your incredible education and you are really hardworking and you are able to develop a certain level of resilience that does not stop you from getting what you want to do, I don't believe that you would be very successful if you did not have integrity and empathy. Those are personal qualities that you will find cut across almost any area of work that you're going to be involved in. So, that's what I would say to any young woman and man, but I especially want to give a shout out for the women because, from my experience, they will have to work twice as hard as my generation unless we are able to move forward to make sure that the generations to come will have equal access to everything notwithstanding, which gender you are.

**Kemuel:** Well, thank you! So to any of the youth listening, remember that hard work and education are essential factors that we have to take into account in order to make a difference, as Ms. Kabagambe so eloquently said. Thank you for those tips, Ms. Kabagambe. **One last question, how can the Voice of Africa support your causes?**

**Anne K:** Well, first, you're doing that by reaching out to people in our community and speaking to us, so I want to thank you for doing that. Second, it is important that in this world that is now completely based on social media, you are able reach out to not only the local community, but to as big an audience as possible. So, I would probably hope that you would speak to as many of my African colleagues as possible so that these ideas are disseminated to a much larger community, hopefully both here **[insert place]** and on the continent.

**Kemuel:** Thank you. Thank you for taking the time to sit with us and discuss about being of service to our people; I know running 22 countries is no walk in the park.

**Anne K:** Thank you very much. It's been a total pleasure for me to talk to you and good luck in your efforts.

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