

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Governments all over the world accept that associations are actually repositories of knowledge. They don't just ignore that. So last year, in the month of June here in Kenya, the Ministry of Education established a task force on actually how to reopen schools. And the Task Force had a 10 member Task Force where nine of them were actually associations related to the sector of education.

Mary Kate:

Welcome to the Stronger By Association podcast. This podcast will share stories about how associations are solving problems in the United States and around the world. This is brought to you by American Society of Association Executives, ASAE, a membership organization of more than 46,000 association professionals, industry partners in the United States and 50 countries. Our members make the world safer, better and smarter.

Mary Kate:

Welcome to the Stronger By Association podcast. Today we have a great international episode where we're going to talk to three leaders in associations from around the world. And I am pleased to welcome my co host today, Amy Hissrich, CAE, Vice President Global and Web Strategy. Welcome, Amy.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Thank you, Mary Kate, thank you for having me. I'm excited to be on this episode because the pandemic and economic issues that we're all facing are truly global. So we really wanted to talk to association professionals in different regions to see how they're adapting their operations, their business models and maintaining relevance as the pandemic progresses and as we head into recovery, so that we can all learn from each other as a global community of associations.

Mary Kate:

And Amy, we're so glad to have you as the co host today you lead our international work, you've lined up three terrific guests. We'll talk to association leaders on the ground in China and Belgium and Kenya for a great discussion on how COVID's impacting their side of the worlds and the association community and the economic and political perspective. I was an intern many years ago at the European Parliament in Belgium and so much chocolate, so much beer and waffles.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Love a good Leah's waffle. Yeah, I cannot wait to start traveling again.

Mary Kate:

Absolutely. Well, I'll have to host on the ground podcast episodes in our favorite capitals. We are now pleased to welcome Dr. Alexander Mohr, Executive Director European Flavor Association and Board Member of the European Society of Association Executives.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

We're so happy to have you here, Alexander. So you are based in Brussels, can you give us an update on what the situation relative to COVID is like on the ground where you are?

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

So at the moment, the situation is almost everywhere in Europe the same. We are in a kind of lockdown scenario that means in Belgium which here in Brussels, the capital of Europe we have a very light lockdown scenario that means we have a curfew from 10 o'clock at night until six o'clock in the morning, but that is important. The offices, the shops are open. So there is more or less a feeling of normality here. In other countries, of course, Germany is in a more stricter lockdown because they had also very high numbers. And there from country to country, this changes a little bit, but here in Brussels at the moment, it's a lite version.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

Nonetheless, there is of course, no travel. There is restrictions to travel, to cross the border and so forth. So there are a lot of administrative hurdles. But every country at the end of the day is handling the situation depending on their local or regional problems themselves.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Yeah, that makes sense. From an association operations perspective, what has the last maybe say quarter look like and what do you anticipate the next say six to nine months might look like for associations?

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

So this is of course, a very tricky question. The situation the last three to six months, I think towards the end of last year there was a little bit of hope on the horizon that people thought, okay, we are through the worst now and now things will level, will go rather quick and vaccination program started and so forth. And now it's February and actually the numbers do not look better, but they're not fantastic.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

So the problem is that the travel restrictions are still in place. Here in Brussels, so Belgium, for example, home office is mandatory. So face to face meetings are not possible at the moment which for associations in general are a problem. And maybe we can touch on this a little bit further. But associations work is it's people's business. So meeting your members, meeting officials at the European institutions, I believe, from my understanding is absolutely the core of what we do. And you can replace advocacy, for example, to some extent with video calls. And I think everybody's now used to it. But I personally feel there are limitations to it as well.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

Nonverbal communication, discussing human resources issues, discussing strategy has its limitations when it comes to video calls. That's my personal belief. Others might see that differently. For the European Society of Association Executives what is nice is that we provided a platform and a kind of community feeling that people can share their experiences and frustrations. But also that everybody can learn from each other and to find a platform to actually exchange among peers. I think that has worked pretty well and we are trying to actually, it's becoming one of the core elements of the European Society for Association Executives. And I think it's very important to give people the feeling not to be alone in this.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

So said that you asked me about the outlook? Now, that's, of course, tricky. I was wrong in the past. So I'm a little bit of burned child. I think we will by June return, at least to think about face to face meetings again. For the associations, that's for sure true. The problem is or the challenge is that our members have their individual company travel policies on top of everything. So even if we can decide whatever, that we would like to go back to our normal meeting routine, there are, of course, our members who also then have to travel and if that is not possible for some of the members, we might stay longer with this whole virtual tools than I would love to. But this depends at the moment, I think things are lightening up.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

But when it comes to air travel, when it comes to intercontinental travel maybe we might see some more challenges. So for now, worse will be over hopefully in June. September, I really hope we can plan.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Thank you for sharing that. I recognize that none of us have been able to predict this at any level, at any point in time. But what we have seen our associations being more nimble in this time I think then we traditionally have seen. You mentioned pivoting to online community, pivoting to virtual events. Are there other business model lessons that you've seen come about as a result of the pandemic? And how do you see those being explored?

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

So there in my answer, I have to split that one. The one is the business models of European Associations or I speak specifically about trade associations here in Brussels. And there you have basically different business models, okay? And I like to use the word business models, because it is actually a business model and then sometimes overlooked. So you have some are just member fee based associations. And then others are having national associations which gives maybe more stability in their revenue stream. And then there's a third element. This is when associations are also, for example, organizing trade shows. I think in the US, this is much more common than it is here in Europe.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

There are some associations who actually get their revenue through trade shows which they organize, let's say every two years. So there are different models. And I think this pandemic and this challenge has now forced a lot of associations to actually look into their business model and to see what they can do differently or how they are extending their services for example, and or how they are positioning themselves. What I hear from my colleagues is, there are also discussions now about certain associations to maybe merge. There are other associations who want to outsource more of their services and so forth. So there is a lot of movement in the business model of associations to come back to that term.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

For the European Society of Association Executives, we have also partners from the UK and this is as you know a special case with Brexit. And here, the travel, the meeting industry is heavily hit. They have not only the pandemic, they have Brexit on top. People are maybe a little bit reluctant to travel at the moment. So there are a lot of elements at the moment coming together. But you are absolutely right. I think associations have to rethink their strategies when it comes to revenue and also about membership

engagement. I don't know how far we want to go into this, but there are different elements and it all comes a little bit together at the same time.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

I still believe that the associations are very adapting, we're adapting extremely quickly to this environment. At least here in Europe as the European Society, we try to provide a platform with webinars and workshops and so forth to actually guide everybody along this, let's call it a transition because it was a transition. And I think a lot of these elements will remain so the business model will change a little bit, not fundamentally. But I think associations have to adapt to the circumstances, absolutely.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

One potentially last question on that COVID front, we've seen a lot of associations playing roles on the front line helping during the pandemic, and taking steps towards the recovery. Do you have any examples of associations either in Brussels or in Europe more generally, that you feel have demonstrated that for you?

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

I think last year when the pandemic was basically... How do I say? Nobody knew in which direction it all got and there was also a certain kind of a panic is maybe too strong, but a very great concern in which direction always goes. A lot of member companies for themselves, but also in coordination with the national associations in Europe, they worked and help providing, for example, sanitizing products free of charge and communicated about this. And that I think, was really great to see that people were looking beyond their direct business model, but actually provided as much help as they could and I think that worked very, very good from the examples that I have heard try to help with the information that we could gather, so it became like one package.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

We also work here with the Global Association, which also then showed us a lot of examples of global associations, but also companies helping in this respect with their local and regional governments. So that was overall I think, a very, very nice to see. I think it was also really touching to see that how many people were actually in the food and drink industry, working so much and constantly providing support to the local markets, supermarkets and so forth. I think it was really great to see. But here, of course, I speak on behalf of the flavor industry.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

For the associations, I think, I know this was a really horrible time for the associations. It might has sometimes even brought us closer to our members and working together also on aspects which are not directly linked, actually, to our everyday work where we provide our services. So I think that was also an element we can maybe build on in the future.

Mary Kate:

We've heard that from some of our members as well, but COVID they provided more value, their members have needed them more than ever. And I guess the challenge is how do we translate that into staying alive from a business model perspective.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

No, absolutely. Absolutely, no.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Sort of dovetailing on Mary Kate's Brexit question, not related to COVID, but we want to take the opportunity since we just had and transition to a new administration here in the states, just see who had any thoughts to share about any ways you see that impacting European Associations?

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

I think there are two things. The one is the overall political, let me say atmosphere. And I think here Europeans are very supportive of the new presidency and the new government. On the other aspects and that's maybe the one that is at the moment very prominently discussed is the trade dispute between the US and Europe. So I do not believe that these form of trade disputes will suddenly go away with a new administration. I think these trade issues will stay with us for the years to come. And therefore, of course, there is great concern, if certain products are suddenly banned. And I mean this either way, or text very high, because of course, this is a global supply chain. So you need products from the US to produce here and the other way around.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

So I would love to see this slowly dissolving in a very rational manner. We just signed a call with others, I think 17 or 70 associations here in Brussels and calling to solve this dispute, which is a little bit of a concern when it comes to the supply chain. Nonetheless, I think these are the two elements, but overall, I think there is a relief at the moment when it comes to the political environment and we are in between the political and the economic world. A little bit mediating in between and I can feel there's a certain kind of... It's a little bit lighter, but that doesn't mean that the problems will go away overnight, I think.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

If I can make a final remark, the funny thing is that we very often see Europe as a unit and we have 28 member states. And I think what was interesting about this pandemic is that you have 28 member states dealing with the situation in a slightly different way and then within the countries, you have different regions handling the situation slightly different, which lead to a pretty fragmented situation and very difficult for people who have to travel around, for example or to find ways around. So I think, this is something maybe the European Union can work on a little bit better in the future to actually better coordinate, better inform. So I hope that out of all of this there's a steep learning curve also how to handle such crisis of pandemics in the future. I'm talking like it's already over, it's not, but I really hope the European Union and all the other regions in the world come out stronger out of this because it's needed.

Mary Kate:

We can certainly relate to that problem.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Yeah, exactly. Not to be negative and hopefully you guys will figure it out, but even the United States being a federated model with our states, our states all handled it pretty differently. And as you've

probably seen on the news we've had very similar issues, no national mass mandate and going to the different states is probably very similar to going to different avenues.

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

Yeah, that's true. That's true.

Mary Kate:

Well, thank you so much for joining us. This has been a great conversation and it seems like we're on the upswing, things aren't getting better. And we hope to have you back in the [Mecca 00:17:56] still in drive and talk about in person meetings in Europe again. Can we host this in Brussels?

Alexander Mohr, PhD, Executive Director, European:

Thank you very much for having me. This was really, really interesting. And yeah, anytime would be great to be in touch.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Thanks for sharing your perspective, it's always so helpful to hear what's happening in other parts of the world and how they're handling the same types of issues that we're all facing.

Mary Kate:

We're now heading to Beijing to interview Steven Basart, Vice President from Kellen, who is also Chair of the International Section Council, and he's a familiar face to many international associations.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Steven Happy Lunar New Year. Do you want to tell us a little bit about the year that we're heading into and why we might want to be hopeful?

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Happy New Year of the Ox from us here in China. It's indeed the start of the Lunar New Year. And after a tumultuous Year of the Rat, which is notoriously known here in China to be a not a very good year. We're now facing the Year of the Ox, which again, what I understand from everyone that I come across here during this week of New Year celebration is promising to be a very auspicious year ahead. So that's a positive note to start off this conversation today. And again, Happy New Year of the Ox to you all.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Every time I talk to you, I get so optimistic about what is happening and the fact that I don't see you now stuck at home and I see you being able to travel to other cities within China, can you give us a current take on the situation on the ground? What's going on there relative to COVID?

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Yeah, definitely. Yeah. And I think I'm glad I can be that inspiration of some optimism. I think we're still... Well, I'm very hopeful and optimistic. Definitely what we see here happening in the last few months. There is some need to be still realistic and pragmatic, of course, but overall, the situation here in China has been relatively well under control and I think that goes for many countries here in the Asia Pacific

region. Looking at Vietnam, Taiwan and other countries in the region, particularly these countries that have had very strong or strict pandemic control measures have effectively been able to keep the number of cases in the past few months very low.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

And here in China, as you said, that has meant that cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and large parts of the country for several weeks or even months in a row would have no local domestic cases. I've gone through the trouble myself of returning from Europe to China, and I know firsthand that you have to go through a very strict central quarantine process. So essentially, going through 14 days of a central managed quarantine in a facility, a hotel that you essentially cannot leave your room. So all cases in that period, essentially has been stuck in quarantine, and allowed to some degree of business to resume to normal.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

As you said, gradually, we see more business meetings coming up again. A lot of the companies have resumed either full in office work or partial in office work with some hybrid options for staff that prefer to work from home. But again, large companies do resume a lot of in office work and as you said we do have our business meetings back domestically in the country, traveling to Shanghai for a board meeting. We've seen many large organizations, even hosting conferences, again in person with up to 100s or even 1000s of attendees. It's still not completely back to the old normal, a lots of preventative measures, strict contact tracing or COVID apps.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

We have a health tracker app that we're required to scan QR codes going into offices, buildings, or attending a conference, having our temperature taken, but I'm glad. It's a little bit of optimism from this side of the world and hopefully that can continue.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Can you walk us through the impact on operations from when it was at its worst to as it started to open up to what you're seeing now? So are you saying... We can take it from a revenue impact or a business impact. How bad were things impacted? Were you seeing large changes in in operations as far as reduced revenue flows or organizations having to shut employees and is that getting better? And if so, what's the process by which that's gotten better?

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Let me just start out from the start of the pandemic, when we were all in panic. It's a year ago. A year ago, here around Chinese New Year, we're all listening to what was happening in Wuhan. And at that time, no one I think had anticipated what this would become and where it would lead to on a global scale. Now, looking at associations at that time operating here in China, of course, there was a lot of concern, when it came to in person meetings. We all immediately knew that we couldn't go back to the offices, there were a lot of restrictions on getting together. And immediately, there were a lot of preventative measures taken by both local government, as well as some national governments.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

So from that perspective, initially, especially in the first month, of course, any meeting that was planned and any board meeting, any in person conference was all canceled. So that was a tremendous impact. I do think and this is the power of a podcast, I think it's important to highlight that many organizations did step in there and provided a very good platform for communication. We've been working with associations in the meetings and events, industries. And obviously, with that industry being substantially impacted here, in the initial circumstances or in the initial stage of the pandemic here in China when it wasn't global, yet, it was very important for the industry to keep a tap on what was happening here, what kind of policies were being implemented for the industries.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

And as the pandemic became global, use that information and exchange on some of the lessons that were evolving out of what was happening here in China. So I think it's really important to see that role that associations played. And now we come across any difference or many other organizations that's at the initial stage of the pandemic, really provided that use as a platform to check in what is happening in the industry, what is happening in the profession, gathering that insights and seeing what as an industry association or a professional society can we do to support people that are now stuck at home industries that are now forced to stop.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

That's great, as you're starting to see things coming back to quote unquote normal or the new normal or the COVID normal.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

So I think through the past months we've seen as around the world, a lot of experimentation when it comes to taking things virtual, right? Looking at new ways of providing membership value to members across the world. I think probably one of the biggest lessons learned for organizations is to look at that virtual strategy and digital formats. When I talk to colleagues in the AZ community, many have expressed that their organizations for years and years have been talking about virtual meetings, creating more digital content, being more effective at creating a presence the organizations. But often boards were overly cautious or conservatives and do baby steps when it comes to really looking at how can we be ready for a new worlds that is more digital and a new way of engaging with our members.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

And I think what we've seen with the pandemic is that when it comes to these digital drivers, suddenly, all organizations were forced to go into warp speed, right? We were all going in overdrive and looking at solutions, how can we still be working or servicing our members through different ways? So definitely, from what we've seen here in China, for most of the US and Europe associations have taken their events virtual. But now gradually, we do see more opportunity, as I said for in person meetings. We do see hybrid meetings coming and more opportunities to meet again in person as the situation here domestically stabilizes.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Do associations play the same role in China? Is there a difference in the business model of associations in the way they operate in China, relative to say, the Europe or the West generally?

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

For the US Association or your European associations, they come tradition from that same background as how you operate the association in Europe or in the US. But obviously, there needs to be tweaks to the business model and how you are successful here. And recognizing that China is a different country and the ecosystem in which you need to operate and the services that you can provide to your members may have to be tailored to meet those needs.

Mary Kate:

Steven, we talk a lot about the origins of associations in America to Tocqueville and the ability of Americans to associate. Can you share more about the origin of associations in China?

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Yeah, definitely. Now, traditionally in China associations have been part of the government, staffed by the government, managed by the government and essentially acting as a branch of the government. So it's very different from the US and Europe, as you said, where the association comes from the people. It's organized by the industry as a platform between industry and government. And here in China, traditionally, it's been organized as a platform between government and companies, or government and profession, but managed and organized by the government. Through the last decade we've seen a lot of change happening with that and actually, at some previous events that we've organized, I've spoken about the reform that is happening on the Chinese Association and how they're gradually being decoupled from their traditional government managed background.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

So there's a lot of change in that. But I think linking it a little bit to the pandemic, it's interesting to see how in the initial response to the pandemic, Chinese Association have been very active in responding to the needs of industry. So really looking at what is happening, how is our industry impacted, they conducted many surveys checking in how companies were impacted financially, operationally, and seeing what kind of platform they can provide then again, to provide that platform of communication to the government. So we do see the type of role but again, seeing it from the history and how traditional Chinese Associations are managed, that's very different than, of course, how the US or European associations would do that.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Now, conversely, and I gave the example a little bit of how some of the global organizations or the global associations in China here have responded to the pandemic there have been really good initiatives by global associations as well to really check in with at least how are members in China doing at the start of the pandemic? What is the impact on the industry and using that body of knowledge eventually as part of the ongoing conversation as the pandemic went global. So it's a little bit of a segue again, back to global but, yeah, no, I think it's a really good question and important to understand that background of associations here.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Maybe one additional point because it is true for China, that's what I said in terms of the way these associations are managed. But it's good to point out that it's not only China, that has a very different Association tradition. If you look at Korea, Japan these are historically, very different countries and the role that associations definitely play in these ecosystems as I would call it is slightly different than how we operate in Europe or the US.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

So Steven, a couple of times, you've mentioned associations playing a role and in really helping relative to the pandemic. Do you have some specific examples of work that you've seen associations do showcasing the power of aid that you can share?

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Yes. Yeah, definitely. And as you said, there have been many associations that have been playing a key role at the frontlines. And as I mentioned, one of the organizations that we've been with our team quite involved with is a association in the exhibitions and events industry. And really, at the start of the pandemic, they provided a essential platform for communication and collecting policies, what is happening in industry, but really guiding the industry of creating a standard or a platform to help manage the challenges and adjust to the challenges that the industry was facing. And as the pandemic evolved, provide a platform where peers could get together and really discuss about again, ongoing challenges, but also trying to make a roadmap to look beyond what is currently happening and anticipate what could be a safe recovery after most of the challenges has been dealt with.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Maybe another example to mention is that we've been involved with associations that represent the airline industry. And I think we all know how severely the airline industry has been hit by the current epidemic. And one of the key challenges that associations or airlines are currently facing is, of course, the concern about health when you travel. And one of the associations we work closely with or we actually manage as current is the Airline Passenger Experience Association, which is one of the largest international airline associations. And then with the industry being impacted deeply, at the start of the pandemic, the association recognizing the challenges for the industry, but also looking a little bit at how what would be a recovery and what would be the requirements for passengers to travel again.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Really looked at creating a free certification program for airlines to basically have a coherence industry standard for safety, that then passengers could reference and understand, okay, our airline has been accredited, and is a to a certain standard when it comes to health and traveling on the airline.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

So those are again, from the power of a perspective, I think, really key examples of how Association provide that platform, whether it's for information, industry setting or when it comes to certifying and recognizing that a certain airline or a certain program is up to the standard and really guiding people with correct objective information.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

That's great. Thank you. One last question. It is not related to COVID. But we here in the United States just had a new administration come into office and I just wanted to get a sense of how you saw that change impacting associations in China or the region on things such as trade?

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

Well, Amy, I think that could be an hour of conversation. And actually, I think recently we did a webinar on that topic and that took over an hour. And I think we were still not finished after an hour. But as I

mentioned then there was a clear shift in rhetoric at the start when the new administration was confirmed in the US. Under the outgoing administration with Trump still in office, the US was typically target as a rival. When we look at Chinese media, how the US was described was typically a rival. Often elements of antagonism were highlighted, references to escalating tensions and an ongoing conflict, et cetera.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

But as soon as the Biden administration was formally confirmed, I think we did see a shift in that rhetoric in the media here. And it clear indications from the Chinese government that they were hoping for a reset in bilateral relations and that they were hoping to undo some of the trade and defense or foreign policy issues that were pursued on the Trump and even at the highest level looking at the Chinese President Xi Jinping, he congratulated Biden when he took office and indicating that he was hoping for a win win cooperation under his administration. And for those who have worked in China, I'm sure you've heard the term win win cooperation many times before. But it at least gives an indication of what China is hoping to get out of the new administration.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

I think the question will be how the Biden administration will now pursue with the relation it has or needs to repair with China. And Biden has been a longtime supporter of trade liberalization and multilateralism. But it's likely that he will at least retain a stronger stance on China, and that will remain from the administration. So I personally do not think that we should expect any major changes in US trade policy for the region in 2021 especially with the challenges that the world is currently still dealing with and some of the domestic priorities that Biden will have in addressing the pandemic COVID-19 the economy and all that.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

But yeah, let's hope at least that as I said, the Year of the Ox will bring some new hope for us all. And with the new administration in place, it will be a long term conversation and really weighing in all the different priorities on both sides and seeing how that can be further repaired in the years ahead.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Thank you. I know that that was a big question, but I appreciate the top line on that. I think it's something that we've all been giving a lot of thought to. You've been talking about business impact changes, can you talk a little bit about how you see partnerships either becoming more important or changing in this new context?

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

So I think it would also be important to highlight in terms of the business model and the challenges that associations are currently facing with global operations, that there's an importance or an increased importance for a global partnership. And actually, during the AZ webinar that we held last year, I believe over 60%, 70% of the association leaderships had indicated that they were planning on increasing their global partnerships going forward.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

And apart from the area of technology that we talked about key drivers for partnership is also to support global operations and be more flexible when it comes to your operational needs. And global associations cannot effectively service members across the world without having some type of scalable team on the ground or having local partners, counterpart relations that can help you to particularly as you work on your strategic priorities, and delivering members value in the region.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

So now in the end, I think that's going to be very important to look at going forward, how are associations leveraging global partners and really utilizing partnerships to deliver a membership value going forward.

Mary Kate:

It's a great point, Steven and thank you for serving as Chair of the International Section Council. And thank you for staying up late for us and we know it's late in Beijing, and we really appreciate it.

Steven Basart, Vice President, Kellen and Chair, A:

No, thank you for the conversation. I really enjoyed it. And indeed again, Happy New Year of the Ox to everyone and let's look forward to a bright new year, and hopefully, a good recovery for the global situation.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Happy Lunar New Year and thank you for sharing what's happening on the ground. We can all get so focused on our day to day that sometimes it's really helpful to hear from other people on what their experiences are and really just helped to reconnect to the idea that we are all part of a Global Association Community. So thank you for sharing that.

Mary Kate:

We are now pleased to welcome from Nairobi Jeffers Miruka CEO of the African Association of Agriculture Economists, and President of the African Society of Association Executives and DELP scholar.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Jeffers, it's so nice to have you here.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Thank you.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Thank you for joining us. Would you give us an overview of what the situation is in Nairobi and then Africa more broadly, related to COVID and the recovery?

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Let me start by saying that the pandemic has caused us a lot of distress, especially in Africa and here in Kenya. As that now the Kenyan cases stand at about slightly above 100,000 cases which have so far been diagnosed for the last one year. And today, I just learned a couple of minutes ago that 147 new cases

have been tested positive today. So far, cumulatively we have slightly less than 1700 deaths. And also we have only 15,000 active case.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Africa it's a bit different because we have the biggest effect in South Africa, where we have more than 1.5 million people infected, almost 50,000 deaths. But overall, we are really not doing as badly as other parts of maybe the US and even Europe. Yeah, but the effect is actually, across board.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

That's really interesting. Given what you just outlaid as far as the impact and that it may not actually be as pervasive as here in the States or the West more broadly, well, Europe, can you walk us through what the impact has been to Association specifically?

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Since day one, and I'm happy that I closely follow what has been happening there in the US, especially with what Mary has been doing lobbying Congress to make sure that they consider giving some... So, in Africa, we don't have that luxury, we can't ask for any help from our governments. So it came to a point where for Associations just like most nonprofit organizations, just like most governmental organizations, had to think of how they can survive. But the pandemic brought a lot of disorganization in our activities. And what I mean, we had a prepped end for our programs, because we couldn't continue.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

When the pandemic came, governments declared shut down. So the programs, the activities, the operations, and also the services were actually interfered with. So there was a lot of sudden disorganization to our activities. The second thing was, the reactions were also fast, because we had to postpone our events, face to face events, as you know. We had to postpone most of our programs, most of our activities. And also there were also job losses. There are quite a number of people who lost their jobs.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

The other issue is we were not able to adopt much quicker, like maybe when you have a problem, you can quickly adopt to really think on what you can do next. So there are challenges to associations in Africa, there are challenges to solutions in Kenya. And most of those challenges have been because we were totally not prepared. We were caught red handed.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

I think that's true across the world. I do not think that is unique. But one thing we've seen is that because we were all caught unprepared a lot of associations have pivoted and in some cases have become more nimble. Are you seeing that in Africa? Or have you seen business models or lessons learned that you can share with us?

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Yes, yes, yes. And number one, I think one of the things we had to do, especially my organization, some of the things we actually do immediately is to reorient our activities and try to see what works for us, what model works for us. The other thing is that we had to think about how we can be self sustainable

because when the key sources of the revenue is actually affected and we're talking about events, we're talking about programs and activities which have been there, and we're talking about other things like services, no, you have to immediately think about how are we going to be sustainable.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

So most associations had to actually go back to the drawing board and look at their strategic plans, see what is happening, what is likely to work and what is not likely to work. Also, some associations came up with the new products. The issue of doing now webinars, training coming online most associations had to come up with new products or new ways of actually making sure that minimal activities can continue. Obviously, not as much as we wanted, but minimal activities could continue, which can still be a source of maintaining their members, and also trying to think about new revenue streams.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

And the other things I've seen happening a lot in Africa it's new coalitions and partnerships. And we have similar minded associations, let's say sectoral associations, which have said, "Let's work together and see what we can do for the good of our members, for the good of our industry and for the good of the communities that we serve." So I've seen quite a number of associations putting their synergies together, forgetting about competition because sometimes it comes out as competition there before but now we're trying to look at things how they can work together. And obviously, innovations. New innovations on how we are doing our things and we're making sure that this is going to be for the good of the [SG 00:45:14].

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

But at the end of the day, you realize that maybe it was a wake up call some of the things we took for granted for a long time, now it's wake up call and we realize they were actually supposed to have come much earlier than that.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Yeah, I think we see a lot of similar things. You mentioned associations coming together in good ways. Do you have any specific examples of associations maybe working on the frontlines relative to helping COVID?

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Absolutely, absolutely. Two cases which come into my mind almost immediately is in June last year, governments all over the world accept that associations are actually repositories of knowledge. They don't just ignore that. So last year, in the month of June here in Kenya the Ministry of Education established a task force on actually how to reopen schools. And the task force had a 10 member task force where nine of them were actually associations related to the sector of education.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

So nine, were from associations, only one was actually from government. The Ministry of Tourism when they were coming up with the National Tourism and Hospitality Protocols and Guidelines, they established a 17 member Task Force, out of 17 member Task Force 15 were from associations. So basically, that tells you... That's basically what comes into my mind, but I know a lot has been happening. I know the cases in South Africa. I know the cases in West Africa, Nigeria and Ghana. So

associations really played a key role much more broadly than we already know. But always we have our governments coming to us and saying, "Please assist us to do this."

Mary Kate:

I have a question. You were talking about the role of associations and government relations or asking... I'm curious is that a big role for many African associations to advocate on behalf of their members for the government?

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

We all agree that actually one of the major roles of most associations that focus wherever they are, because that is the only way you can speak for your members. It has to be through an organized group that can talk to the members. You cannot do it as individually, like Mary or Amy, you cannot do it. So most associations in Africa tend to take advocacy as a key component of their main objectives. I know I've not been in any association for the last 14 years that I have served in associations, I've not seen any associations which doesn't have advocacy.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

And yes, here in Africa, the only way government listen to us as citizens is through organized groups. And the organized groups which are much more stronger are actually, local associations, regional associations, continental associations. And to a certain extent when you get support from Global Association then it becomes much more stronger.

Mary Kate:

Well, we're certainly working on that as well in the US reminding Congress of the critical value of associations. So it's an eternal role you have to fulfill.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Mary Kate's comment about Congress is a good segue. We just had a change in administration here in the States last month and I was wondering if you could share your thoughts on what you see the potential impact of that change might be between US-Africa relations?

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Thank you so much for that question. And here in Africa, there was a lot of disquietness during the last administration. And when the new Biden administration actually came into power there was overall celebrations here in Africa. I am a parent of three little kids and when it was announced, it was some time like now locally here that Biden has actually been declared the winner. My kids ran to me singing, "Biden, Biden, Biden."

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

You can imagine a six year old who knows what's going on in the US that actually Biden is coming in as the new president. Having said that, I truly believe that we are going to get reengaged with the Washington administration, especially in collaborations and in working together in the many areas we used to work together before the former administration. So it's really there's a lot of hope and there is a lot of goodwill and 99% of Africans from wherever, south to north, west to east they're very positive about the new administration in Washington.

This transcript was exported on Feb 24, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Mary Kate:

Oh, there's a lot to be hopeful about now. So thank you so much for joining us. And we hope to be again in person at conferences soon and see you there.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Thank you so much. Look forward to seeing you all.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Thank you for sharing your perspective.

Jeffers Miruka, CEO, African Association of Agricu:

Thank you.

Mary Kate:

Thank you so much, Amy, for co hosting this episode with me and thinking about the great guests that we had to really share a unique perspective. And for those listeners who are engaged in international work, I have to mention the power of A Awards. There's a special international category and that application is open until May 7th and every year in the beginning part of the year where we honor the great work of associations in the US and around the world. And that's a really important part of the power of A, the great impact that associations have on the economy and society in every country.

Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, Global & Web:

Thanks, Mary Kate. It's always so great to have an opportunity to get a broader perspective and to learn lessons from our association peers around the world. Plus, it's just been so fun to have a chance to travel around the world virtually with you today.

Mary Kate:

Thanks so much, Amy. I will look forward to more of these conversations. Thanks to our listeners. Don't forget to share this with your colleagues and give us a rating and thank you for listening. Thank you so much for listening. For more information visit www.thepowerofa.org and stay tuned for more episodes.