

# The new normal



**Toward a Post-Covid Africa:  
Recovering Together**





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# Dealing with the virus has shown us something wonderful about ourselves

The first Kusi Ideas Festival that was held in Kigali, exactly a year ago, was intended to mark two events in one; the 60th anniversary of Nation Media Group, which is Africa's second-largest publicly listed media house, and also the aggregate 60th anniversary of independent Africa. For that reason, the wide range of very thoughtful and exciting conversations in Kigali in 2019 looked ahead to how the next 60 years would look like in Africa.

We had many grand ideas about how to structure Kusi 2. But like everybody else, we didn't foresee that the coronavirus would cause one of the greatest upheavals in the world in nearly 100 years. Though we didn't foresee the pandemic itself, actually the thoughtful African minds who spoke in Kigali foresaw quite a few of the events that are already beginning to take shape.

For instance, they foresaw a future where urban farming becomes a game changer. Urban farms have been critical in many African cities and towns during the pandemic, as lockdowns and other virus control measures disrupted transportation of food from upcountry.

They foresaw a future where digital dependency increases and a lot more of our daily transactions shift to our mobile devices, and that has happened – although, as in urban farms – they didn't imagine it would come so soon, or that a virus would be the main driver.

They warned us that if we didn't become better keepers of the environment, we could unleash diseases, and climate-related phenomena. Both have happened! Covid-19, which is suspected to have jumped from an animal, is a classic example of our exploitation of nature; and this year East Africa saw the worst floods – and destruction from its rivers and lakes in over 60 years.

And they foresaw a flourishing African culture scene, new types of travelling art and festivals. Again, we are already witnessing this online through continental poetry readings, music concerts, and fashion shows.

These are some of the reasons why Kusi 2 looks at this African resilience, and in keeping with its tradition, looks ahead to how we will come out of this crisis, and what we can

do to keep on course the best things we had going for us.

Covid-19 has claimed over 1.5 million people globally and our prayers are with their families. We hope the next year brings them recovery and healing. Yet, as I am sure this conference will hear, the worst that was predicted for Africa didn't happen. There are experts who will speak to that.

But if you take just one example of malaria, it was predicted that it would wipe out Africa, because malaria treatment programmes would collapse, and no bed nets would be distributed. While the threat remains real, a few countries did even better, increasing their bed net distribution!

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic in most countries in Africa has been spectacular. When the pandemic broke out, as at January 2020, no African country had laboratories that could test for the virus. But by February, three had, and today all of them do. Nigeria alone has 80 laboratories with the capacity to test for Covid-19. It is our hope that with the lessons learnt our governments will apply the same vigour and resources to deal with other existential threats and other health challenges like cancers, and cardiovascular diseases that claim thousands of lives every year on the continent.

Amidst the pain, this is telling us something wonderful about ourselves as Africans, and we are hoping this festival will explore them. The Nation Media Group, like numerous other media houses all over the world, went through its own trials during the pandemic. But we found it in us to keep faith in ourselves and in Africa. We accepted that our business model had been irreversibly disrupted, the future was digital, and launched the nation.africa brand.

We are unashamedly and unapologetically Pan-African. We believe in Africa and its future and with God's help we shall continue to provide a platform through Kusi Festivals for Africa and Africans to have a robust and honest discussion about ourselves and our continent, and where we want to be among the community of nations.

Wilfred Kiboro is the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Nation Media Group



# Pandemic preparedness: My 21st century task for leaders in Africa

The continent's development will be shaped by how well it can protect against, control, and provide a public health response to current and future pandemics



DR GITHINJI GITAHI

In the mid-1300s, humanity was struck by a deadly pandemic. Spread by fleas and flea-carrying rodents, the plague killed between 70 and 200 million people across the world over a period of about 20 years. Trade was slow and so was movement, and this defined the path of the bacteria that became so notorious that it was nicknamed The Black Death. In England, a quarter of the population died!

This wasn't the first or last plague to strike humanity; the deadly smallpox, eventually defeated in 1978, struck in Mexico, spreading globally and leaving packed graveyards. Another major outbreak in 1918, coming from the battle fronts of the First World War, this time caused by a virus, killed between 50 and 100 million people.

However, humanity largely won the battle against this global enemy through major discoveries in vaccines, antibiotics, hygiene, and other medical advancements.

## And there was relative calm.

But this was not to last long as the world witnessed the HIV pandemic towards the end of the 20th century and in quick succession, threats rose in the name of Ebola, swine flu, Zika virus, SERS and MERS, and currently Covid-19, which at the time of writing this article stands at more than 63 million cases and almost 1.5 million deaths globally in less than 12 months. It has been driven largely by globalisation and movement of people and goods in a highly interconnected world.

In 1969, the World Health Organisation Assembly, guided by the history of 20th century suffering and successes, and informed by the growing movement of people, noted that avoiding pandemics was not going to be the responsibility of a single country, but that of the whole world. The member states of WHO therefore adopted the International Health Regulations. This document, legally binding international law, was to achieve global collaboration to prevent, protect against, control, and provide a public health response to the international spread of diseases in a way that interferes with international traffic and trade.



Medics attend to a Covid-19 patient in the Kenyatta National Hospital's isolation wards at the Infectious Diseases Unit, Mbagathi Hospital, in April, 2020. Picture: File

Some 35 years later, and many gaps unattended on the International Health Regulations by Africa countries, the Ebola epidemic broke out in West Africa and became a big threat to the health, trade, and economy of the world. Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone lost over 11,000 lives and \$2.2 billion in GDP in one year. Actual total cost is estimated to be more than \$53 billion.

Then 51 years later, the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in Africa. As I write this article, the continent has recorded more than two million cases and over 50,000 lives lost. In addition, the continent faces a recession estimated to be an economic contraction of 3.3 per cent, the first in 25 years, leaving many lives and livelihoods destroyed.

It's clear that the future of Africa's socio-economic development will be shaped by how well it prepares to prevent, protect against, control, and pro-

# \$53b

Actual total cost estimated to have been lost by Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone

vide a public health response to current and future pandemics, epidemics, or outbreaks.

How so?

First and foremost, Africa must wake up to the reality that protecting its lives and livelihoods from the shocks of current and future health threats is one and the same thing as building universal health coverage – health security and universal health coverage are two sides of the same coin, as the World Health Organisation Director General, Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, likes to say.

## THE ABUJA DECLARATION: TEN YEARS ON

Most AU countries are not yet on track to achieve the health MDGs and part of the explanation can be found in the lack of financial resources available to them.

The Abuja Declaration recognised this as a potential problem 10 years ago, highlighting the importance for governments in AU countries of giving greater weight to health in the allocation of government revenues, while at the same time urging donor countries to increase their funding

levels.

In the 10 years that have passed since the Abuja Declaration, there has been progress towards increasing the availability of financial resources for health.

However, there has not been appreciable progress in terms of the commitments the AU governments make to health, or in terms of the proportion of gross national income the rich countries devote to official development assistance.

Currently, Africa remains the continent with the lowest universal health coverage, with only 43 per cent of its population achieving effective coverage of health services. Expanding universal health coverage to all, including its key component of financial protection, will mean that the services needed to keep pandemics at bay such as prevention of infectious diseases and other public health common goods will be available to everyone, everywhere across the continent. This will require investment in community health services, including early disease detection and control, with supportive health system infrastructure of laboratory capacity, health data management, and human resources and commodities in an equitable manner where all are included.

## Public resources

This will require Africa to invest more of its public resources in health, in line with previous commitments such as the popular Abuja Declaration to spend at least 15 per cent of governments' general budget expenditure on health. This has to be seen as an investment in the continent's future prosperity rather than merely expenditure. Furthermore, embedding community participation and ownership will only guarantee success and efficiency of these investments.

Secondly, Africa must realise that emergence and re-emergence of diseases is closely linked to climate change, which is causing displacement of people and encroachment of wild lands. This has brought humans face-to-face with new disease-causing pathogens to which they have not developed prior immunity; overpopulation resulting in food security challenges and resulting in consumption of wild animals; and emerging resistance of disease-causing pathogens to antibiotics.

Whereas investment in health may be seen as an individual country responsibility, save for the implementation of International Health Regulations requiring country collaboration, climate change is a global responsibility in which Africa must participate fully as the least contributing continent but one the most impacted because of its pre-existing vulnerabilities. Africa must pay more attention to the 2015 Paris Agreement than it has previously done to ensure accelerated implementation of commitments needed for a sustainable low carbon future.

Finally, the continent must examine its response to impending over-population. It is estimated that Africa will more than double its population by 2050 unless girl education and empowerment are accelerated and barriers to the advancement of girls and women are removed.

This unholy triad of poor access to health services, climate change threats, and overpopulation is my 21st century assignment to African leaders to help the continent escape from pandemics and accompanying social and economic deprivation.

Dr Githinji Gitahi, Group CEO Amref Health Africa and Co-Chair UHC 2030

## ALL ABOUT THE PANDEMIC

**A novel strain of coronavirus – SARS-CoV-2 – was first detected in December 2019 in Wuhan, a city in China's Hubei province with a population of 11 million, after an outbreak of pneumonia without an obvious cause. The virus has now spread to over 200 countries and territories across the globe, and was characterised as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020. As of 30 November 2020, there were 62,195,274 laboratory-confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) infection globally, with 1,453,355 reported deaths. The number of cases and deaths outside of China overtook those within the country on 16 March 2020.**

- The Pharmaceutical Journal



**There were more than 63 million cases and almost 1.5 million deaths globally in less than 12 months**



# Welcome to Kisumu, and let us find a way to rise from this human tragedy



An aerial view of Lake Victoria showing the newly refurbished Kisumu Port (front) and Kisumu Oil Jetty (back). The County Government of Kisumu is still grappling with the relocation of traders whose premises were demolished to pave the way for the expansion of the port. Picture: File

**Success story** Through the mutual responsibility, so central to our communal life, we can build a more prosperous and resilient future



**P. ANYANG' NYONG'O,**

Holding the Kusi Ideas Festival, in collaboration with the Nation Media Group, is a great opportunity for our city and our county. To host guests from far and wide, actually and virtually, at a time when human interaction is severely limited by the necessity to keep safe from Covid-19 is a challenging responsibility. I welcome all our guests to this lakeside city, the gateway to the communities in East Africa whose lives are greatly influenced by our blue economy.

We shall take time to discuss and reflect on how we shall rise from the human tragedy that this pandemic has brought us, knowing that through the mutual social responsibility that has always been central to our communal lives, we can build an even more prosperous and resilient future in East Africa.

We, the nations around Lake Victoria, are all members of the East African Community. The community itself has had its fair share of problems in the past, even breaking up altogether in 1978. But like the proverbial owl of Minerva, the

community shall rise again and fly high as a new African success story, saying goodbye to the dusk of our underdevelopment.

After all, before the modern technology of the steam ship was discovered, we had prosperous trade with Asia, travelling across the Indian Ocean in wind-driven sailing ships, hence the origin of the "Kusi Trade" from which this festival derives its name. We would have achieved even more with this old technology had the slave trade not interrupted us.

This festival is, therefore, held at a time when Africa is positive about her future, looking forward to our cities growing in a planned way as homes to productive people who can feed themselves and sustain good health for all. Giving our farmers all the support needed to feed our growing populations should be the strength of our economies and not their curse. Our youth, our women, and the elderly must surely find a place to feel at home in our societies because they will be politically, economically, and socially inclusive.

This Kusi Ideas Festival will give us a moment for dreaming big dreams in an atmosphere as relaxed as no other. Here in Kisumu we believe that enjoying life is a lifestyle, which is never taught at school: it comes naturally to all who happen to be here. Please enjoy the hospitality of our people.

We have a city that is bubbling with change. There is always something new in Kisumu. Our port, which lay in disuse since 1978, has just been rebuilt, refurbished, and rebranded by the national

government. Maritime transport across the lake to Uganda and Tanzania is resuming at an encouraging pace. Entrepreneurs are eyeing the lake for business opportunities in transport, leisure, and tourism. The Lakefront Development Corporation, an entity of the Kisumu County Government, is building a 46-kilometre promenade on the north-western shore of the lake to open it up for leisure, tourism, and the hospitality industry.

As the city waits for the arrival of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) from Naviasha, the century-old Meter Gauge Railway (MGR) is being revived for both passenger and freight transport from Nairobi through Nakuru. As one takes this legendary Lunatic Express to the hinterland through the Rift Valley, one passes through the lash sugar belt soon after leaving Kisumu. This belt will soon be home to a Special Economic Zone of 2,000 acres, ready to house industrial, commercial, and financial investments from all over the world.

This, indeed, is the moment to be in Kisumu as we prepare for yet another conference in November next year – the Africities Summit. This will be the sec-

**Africa is positive about her future, looking forward to our cities growing in a planned way**



President Uhuru Kenyatta during an inspection tour of improvement works at Kisumu Port. Picture: File

ond time that Kenya will be hosting this coming together of leaders of cities and municipalities, and which will allow national governments to discuss how the African city of the future should and shall look like in the aftermath of Covid-19, as we also face other problems such as global warming and climate change.

We hope that our guests will make the time to enjoy the artistic talent that abounds in our city in terms of music, dance, and traditional art. Kisumu has in recent years attracted players in the film industry, with more and more movies being shot in the city and its vicinity. We are proud of the beauty of our natural scenery, being endowed with such wonders as the legendary Kit Mikayi, recently recognised as a Unesco World Heritage Site. Not far from here is the famous Kakamega Forest, with its gorgeous flora and fauna, and bird sanctuary.

The Thim Lich Ohinga archeological marvel, another Unesco World Heritage Site, is only a few hours' ride away, in southern Nyanza. If you take some time off to relax around the lake, you will be spoilt for choice. There is the Vila del Sol holiday resort on the shores of the lake, a few kilometres west of the airport. A two-hour boat ride will take you to Takawiri or Mfangano islands, both of which have gorgeous holiday resorts. Rusinga island, reachable by air and boat alike, is home to a unique holiday resort situated right next to the Tom Mboya Memorial Museum, the home of one of Kenya's most famous nationalists, assassinated in the prime of his political career, just like the two Kennedy brothers, who were his friends.

Kisumu's story would not be complete without a mention of our proximity to Kogelo in Alego, the home of the father of America's 44th president, Barack Obama. His grandmother, Mama Sarah, still lives there and is always eager to welcome "pilgrims" curious to know about the ancestors of the first black man to become president of the United States. Kisumu opens the gates to such unique historical places in Luoland. But do I say? goes the common expression around here.

Your adventure is not complete until you have taken a half-hour drive towards the lake, to Bondo town, where Kang'o ka Jaramogi has become a great attraction to tourists and historians. This is the home of another great Kenyan nationalist, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, the doyen of opposition politics in the country. Managed by the National Museums of Kenya as a historical site, the Oginga Odinga Museum tells the history of the struggle for independence in memorable photographs and newspaper reports. You will see photographs of leaders from across the globe who interacted with Jaramogi, including Kenya's founding father, Jomo Kenyatta, independence activist and India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first Prime Minister and President.

I welcome you to Kisumu. Karibuni sana.

**P. Anyang' Nyong'o, Governor, County Government of Kisumu**



# Political leaders' role in a caring post-Covid economy

**Social capitalism** The devastating Covid-19 pandemic has made urgent the need to move away from an economy of exploitation to one that puts people first



SABELO NDLOVU-GATSHENI

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the necessity to rethink the existing economic model informed by capitalist logics of exploitation and profit-making. In many instances, the desire for profit trumps consideration for welfare and the environment.

In many African countries, exploitation of minerals without beneficiation, or value addition, has contributed to mass poverty. This compromises people's health and ability to cope with the outbreak of a pandemic of the magnitude of Covid-19.

What has emerged poignantly from coping with Covid-19 is the urgent need to think about the welfare of the many, rather than profits and consumerism. An economy of welfare considers the workers, women, and other vulnerable groups in the society.

Capitalism, which extols profit maximisation, needs to make way for social capitalism. This would ensure that living wages for workers and care for the environment are given priority. Failure to rethink the current model will accentuate poverty and inequality. This, in turn, will make people more vulnerable to global shocks that may result from future pandemics.

More than any region of the world, Africa remains the epicentre of poverty. This, while corporations exploit its resources and political elites misappropriate its wealth. The Covid-19 pandemic has made urgent the need to move away from an economy of exploitation to one of welfare, which puts people first.

The continued entrapment of African countries in the global circuit of capital and its proclivity for large-scale accumulation imperils the ability of many to cope with the pandemic. This reality prompted research that culminated in



the *Palgrave Handbook of African Political Economy* edited by Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba and Toyin Falola.

The handbook illuminates a lively debate on how the past feeds into the present, shaping the political economy of African countries. And it looks at how they could be changed in a way that also values lives, not just profits.

The various chapters cover different aspects of African political economy – in the past and in the present. Conclusions are not the same. But a central argument is the need for structural transformation of economies through value addition to natural resources such as minerals and metals, oil and gas. They also highlight the importance of self-reliance, regional integration, and a more nuanced state involvement.

This should go beyond creating an enabling environment for productive enterprises. It should also ensure distribution in ways that foster inclusive development.

The project enabled a new generation of scholars to revisit the historical ideas of a range of writers. These included Frantz Fanon, Samir Amin, Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, Thandika Mkandawire, Claude Ake, Bade Onimode, and Amílcar Cabral. The scholars

explain the problematic way in which Africa was brought into the global circuit of power and capitalist economy. These were combined with the thoughts of a younger generation of scholars.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni outlined four moments of the rampaging global capital the kidnapping and commodification of black African people through enslavement; the plantation economies where black labour was exploited; colonies where African people were reduced to providers of cheap labour; and the present neo-colonial moment where Africans are suffering due to debt slavery initiated by the present global financial empire supported by the IMF and other financial institutions.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit an Africa that was already structurally fragile and vulnerable. This, due to its invidious position within the global capitalist economy. Lockdown measures had a harsh impact due to the informal nature of the continent's economies.

Some states rolled out massive stimulus packages to the private sector to revamp their economies hit by the lockdowns.

Nevertheless, the IMF forecasts that Africa's economy will shrink by -3.2 per cent in 2020. Growth is now expect-

## REVIEW

Palgrave Handbook of African Economy by Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba, Toyin Falola (eds); Springer Nature, 2020 M06 23 - 1106 pages

This is a specialist single compendium that analyses African political economy in its theoretical, historical and policy dimensions. It emphasises the uniqueness of African political economy within a global capitalist system. It discusses how domestic and international political economic forces continue to shape development outcomes on the continent. Contributors also provoke new thinking on theories and policies to better position the continent's economy to be a critical global force. - Palgrave Macmillan

Coronavirus effects: Workers at Equator Flower Farm in Eldoret, Uasin Gishu County, pack flowers for export on March 16, 2020. Mr Micah Cheserem, the owner of the farm, said the main market is Europe and the flower business had been greatly affected. They are exporting only 10 per cent of what they used to sell due to the lockdown in Europe over coronavirus. Picture: Jared Nyataya

ed to collapse in many countries, especially those dependent on tourism and resources such as oil and mineral exports. Growth in more diversified non-resource-based economies is expected to come to a "near standstill".

Covid-19 has laid bare the inherent contradictions in the political economy of Africa. Lack of a universal basic income in most countries worsened household incomes and welfare. As Akinola Adeoye argues in his chapter in the handbook, the market-oriented reforms imposed on Africa by the Bretton Woods institutions from the 1980s weakened the capacity of its states to reallocate resources.

For his part, Oloruntoba emphasises the external and extractive nature of economies. This has led to loss of revenues in the form of illicit financial flows from the continent, impinging on the capacity of states to mobilise resources.

The management of African economies post-Covid-19 must go beyond sporadic interventions and stimulus packages such as those seen during the pandemic.

It must engage with what Mariana Mazzucato calls market shaping. This means the state becomes active in governing both the supply side of the economy (investments) and the demand side (government as purchaser) so that citizens benefit.

In other words, the state should go beyond fixing market failures to shaping market motives and behaviour.

The synergy that the state formed with the private sector during the pandemic should be sustained in ways that can lead to massive investment in innovation, job-creating infrastructure and social sectors such as education and health.

African political elites must also be held accountable by both civil society and the private sector to minimise rent-seeking. This will ensure that resources are judiciously used to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni is Professor and Chairman of Epistemologies of the Global South, University of Bareuth, Germany, University of South Africa, while Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba is visiting professor, Institute of African Studies, Carleton University.

Capitalism, which extols profit maximisation, needs to make way for social capitalism



# Africa needs a robust vaccine pipeline to avoid being relegated to back of queue

**Rich countries**, representing 13 per cent of the global population, have claimed half of all the doses that will be made available, so African countries may have to wait until 2022



GRACE MERCY OSEWE

**N**ews of the successful development of a vaccine against the virus that causes Covid-19 was met with a global sigh of relief. Vaccine distribution is slated to start in early 2021. Where does Africa stand in this scenario?

Already, Oxfam has cautioned that rich countries, representing 13 per cent of the global population, have claimed half of all the Covid-19 vaccine doses that will be made available. This means that many African countries may have to wait until 2022 to get sufficient vaccines for their populations.

However, there is hope on the horizon, with a robust vaccine pipeline. There are many candidates on a variety of platforms and technologies with results expected in the first half of 2021, with the initial millions of doses delivered by mid-2021.

Proposed strategies for improvement have focused on ensuring vaccine availability, minimising stock-outs, and enhancing vaccination coverage. The transport, energy, and health sectors together form the core of the logistical infrastructure from the time the vaccines are manufactured, delivered to central storage points, distributed, and administered to a recipient at a specified location.

Globally, immunisation is recognised as one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions, reducing infectious disease-related morbidity and mortality of children at a low cost, and saving millions of lives. However, achieving universal immunisation coverage continues to be a challenge.

The Covid-19 death rate in Africa has been lower than Europe and the Americas, with the bulk of reported cases and deaths (75 per cent) concentrated in five countries, namely South Africa, Morocco, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Tunisia. On the flip side, due to the higher levels of poverty and weak health systems, millions of people have been pushed deeper into poverty, and the disease burden has gone up, with routine immunisation and essential maternal and child health services declining, as well as HIV, TB and malaria care. The rapid increase in Cov-

## MOST PROMISING VACCINES (OCTOBER 30, 2020)

Most promising Vaccines	AstraZeneca	J&J	moderna	Pfizer	国药集团	sinovac	NOVAVAX
Type of vaccine	Viral vector	Viral vector	mRNA	mRNA	Whole Virus (2)	Whole Virus	Sub-Unit
Phase	III	III	III	III	III	III	VII
Dose	One Dose (TCB)	One Dose (TCB)	Two Doses (TCB)	Two Doses (TCB)	Two Doses (TCB)	Two Doses (TCB)	Two Doses (TCB)
Cost to purchaser	\$3-4 per dose (\$2/d via serum India)	\$10 per dose	\$32-37 per dose (HIC)	\$19.5 per dose (HIC)	-	-	\$3-16 per dose (HIC)
Manufacturing capacity	0.8b d by 12/20	1b doses by 12/2021	1b doses by 12/2021	1b doses by 12/2020; 1.3b doses by 12/2021	0.2b doses by 12/2020	0.1b doses by 12/2020	100m doses by 12/2020: 1b Annual



id-19 cases is causing a significant loss of life and overwhelming many health systems.

The majority of the Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) are working through the COVAX facility - a partnership of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Gavi, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) - to secure subsidised vaccines for their populations.

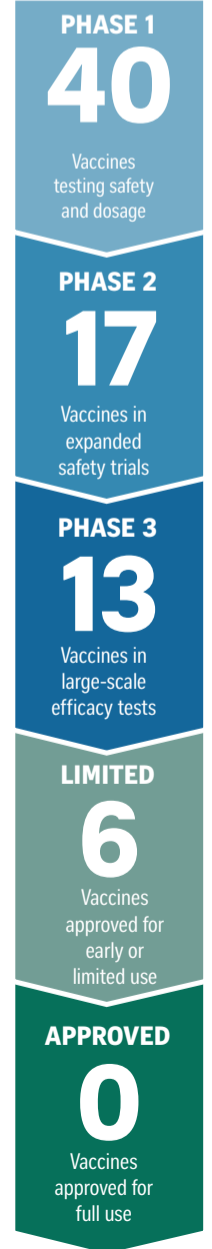
WHO Africa estimates that the cost of rolling out a two-dose regimen of the Covid-19 vaccine to priority populations in Africa will be around \$5.7 billion. An additional 15-20 per cent will be required for associated materials (syringes and needles) and the delivery of vaccines (trained health workers, supply chain, logistics, risk communication, community mobilisation, and monitoring of any adverse events). However, the final prices have still to be determined and discussions with COVAX are in progress to determine if further subsidies can be provided, including free vaccines for priority targets in LMICs.

Lack of access and inadequate health systems have shaped the narrative in Africa regarding epidemics, from HIV to H5NI influenza and now Covid-19. Africans have perished while awaiting donor/development support to purchase



**Immunisation is recognised as one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions, reducing morbidity**

## COVID-19 Vaccines Pipeline



needed supplies for diagnosis and treatment. The newly established Africa Centres for Disease Control (CDC) created a partnership to accelerate Covid-19 testing to fill this gap. The situation is somewhat better as countries have started to manufacture test kits locally in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco, Senegal, and South Africa.

Due to the limited quantities of vaccines that will be available in the early stages, COVAX will initially focus on 3 per cent of the population (health workers and people with underlying conditions), progressively increasing to 16-20 per cent as more vaccines become available.

Estimates suggest that vaccination levels of 60-70 per cent are needed to achieve herd immunity, the level at which most people are protected against a virus. Africa will need 1.5 billion doses to vaccinate 60 per cent of its population of 1.2 billion, assuming there are two doses per vaccine. Given that up to 80 per cent of the projected production for 2021 has already been secured by developed countries, a more realistic option is for the continent to collectively negotiate directly with vaccine manufacturers to secure additional supplies under bilateral arrangements.

Obtaining and delivering the Covid-19 vaccines while continuing with routine immunisation will present a range of formidable challenges. Now is the time to create an enabling environment, and a preparedness assessment is key to this process. With the first vaccines projected to become more available in the early part of 2021, the window for planning and preparation is now.

The immediate goal for each country is to efficiently execute complex immunisation campaigns simultaneously, to multiple "non-traditional" immu-

nisation target groups in each country. Establishing a strategic framework for collaboration with Unicef, WHO, Gavi, local and regional regulatory agencies, development partners, the private sector, and civil society is the starting point. At the implementation level, institutions or groups with structures to manage logistics in disasters or emergencies such as the military, or those with a comparative advantage in logistics, information systems, and communication, such as private sector suppliers of fast-moving goods, should be co-opted into this framework. The preparedness assessment should inform vaccine delivery and distribution; public communication and education; mobilisation, recruitment, training, and monitoring of healthcare workers and volunteers; as well as safe and efficient administration of Covid-19 vaccines.

## The first doses

The key question of who should receive the first doses of the vaccine is complex and should be determined in the earliest stages of planning. For example, frontline workers are often at the top of the proposed priority lists.

Risk communication should underpin the entire vaccination effort to improve uptake by providing beneficial information, addressing misinformation and rumours, and targeting specific factors driving vaccine hesitancy in the different contexts. An active social media campaign can mitigate issues as they arise and improve overall outcomes.

Last but not least, all these efforts are worth little without a robust surveillance system in place for early detection and rapid, targeted responses. In order to ensure appropriate vaccine reporting, monitoring, and evaluation, countries should begin to prepare and improve their vaccine management, reporting, monitoring, and evaluation systems to reduce stock-outs and wastage, and to ensure proper re-allocation and accountability.

Countries worldwide are still figuring out the best information system to manage this entire Covid-19 vaccine process, including distribution and quality assurance, especially where multiple doses are required. At operational level, individuals need to know what vaccine they are getting and remember or be reminded to get the second dose; health providers need to keep track of who has received what vaccines so they can provide the correct second dose; and above all, the government needs to distribute the right type of vaccines to the right geographic regions to avoid stock-outs, especially when people are ready for the second dose.

Africa is in a unique situation. The African Union has established Africa CDC, a specialised health agency dedicated to Africa that is leading the fight against Covid-19 in the region. It is currently engaged with various development partners, researchers, and pharmaceutical companies to explore how Africa can obtain and distribute the Covid-19 vaccine.

Grace Mercy Osewe is Senior Public Health Specialist and Managing Director, MDA Health Consulting Limited



# Technology shatters restrictive colonial boundaries

**Trade corridors**  
Regional economic communities have been at the forefront of championing intra-continental trade



ERASTUS MWENCHA

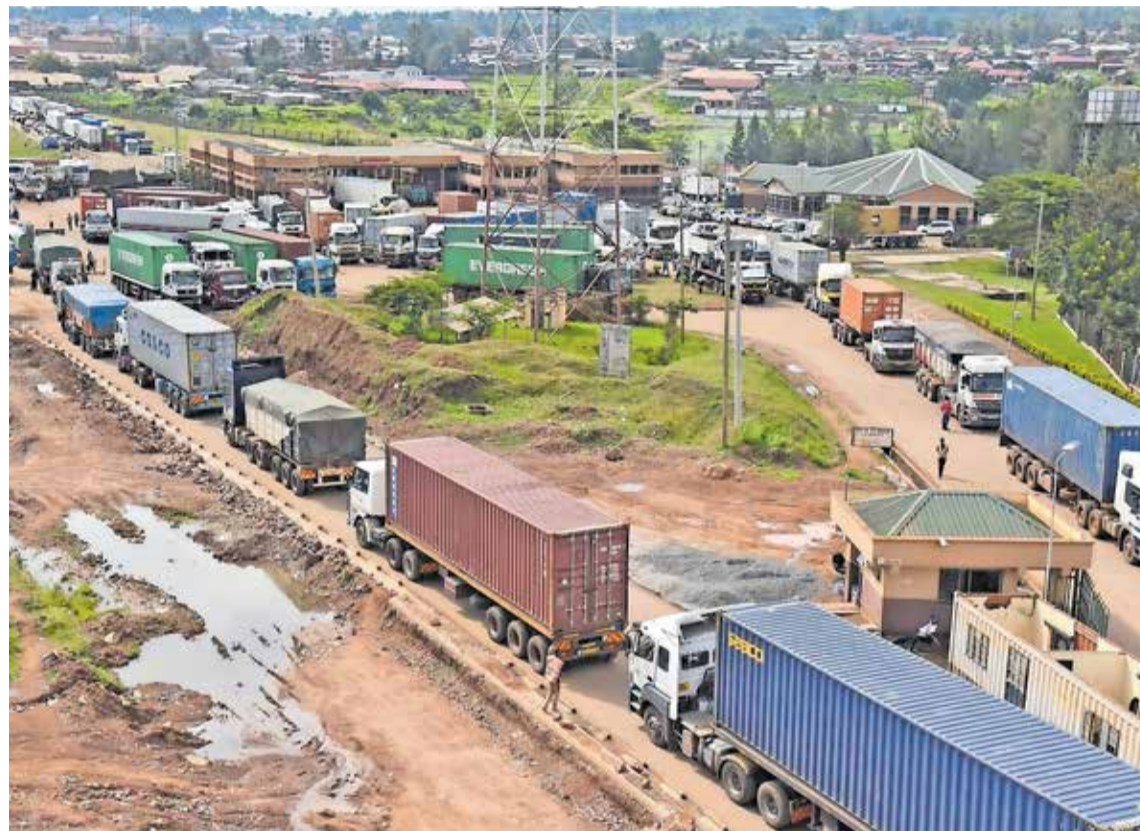
Sixty years since most African States attained independence, the Covid-19 pandemic has shone a fresh spotlight on the folly of the haphazard colonial boundaries.

Long traffic jams at border posts across the continent, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, were the poster child of the non-tariff barriers that continue to hamper trade in Africa. These boundaries are the primary reason for the high cost of doing business in Africa and are the cause of low intra-African trade, investment, economic integration, and poverty.

Covid-19 has also introduced a new economic paradigm, with digital technology taking the lead to ease the safe flow of goods across borders. If the pandemic persists late into 2021, some of the new digital technologies introduced to facilitate safe cross-border movement could become permanent fixtures across the continent and indeed other parts of the world.

The concept of intra-African trade dates before the 15th century. Despite war and competitiveness among African empires, they traded among themselves, sometimes travelling long distances to do so. The Songhai Empire practically controlled the trans-Saharan trade whereby an array of goods and services including gold, slaves, ivory, silk, horses, and sugar were exchanged. As is the case today, trade was a mutual exchange of goods and services and it had two dimensions to it; commercial and societal.

With increased trading activities came a well-developed system of trading. The barter trade system was eventually replaced by currencies such as coins used in northern Africa, brass rods used by the Tiv of Nigeria, and copper ingots in central and parts of southern Africa.



Slow Covid-19 testing causes truck pile up at the Malaba border point between Kenya and Uganda. Picture: File

To overcome the challenges of adverse weather conditions that rendered some trade routes impassable and the insecurity posed by raiders, traders started sharing information and goods.

Trade routes were developed, opening up previously inaccessible regions. Societies were formed, ultimately leading to European colonisation of Africa.

## Trade patterns

With colonialism came new trade patterns. The transport corridors were designed to extract raw materials from the hinterland to the metropolitan centres. The Berlin Conference of 1884 portioned Africa into small colonial enclaves, leading to the creation of 55 African states, 17 of which are landlocked. The partition was intended to settle disputes in the scramble for African land among the colonial powers; it was cer-

**Africans often travelled long distances to traded among themselves**

tainly not for the benefit of Africans. The boundaries engendered rivalries that have persisted and taken the form of mistrust among African leaders.

These rivalries have been costly to the continent and partly explain the perpetual disadvantages that have contributed to Africa's poor performance in economic, social, and even political growth. Almost 140 years since they were drawn up, the arbitrary boundaries continue to define the relationships among Africa states.

Intra-African trade has continued to suffer, dropping to between 14 to 18 per cent of total traded goods and services.

Landlocked countries face huge challenges because of trans-shipment of goods, leading to high cost of doing business. Global studies indicate a common feature among landlocked countries: low property prices, low industrialisation, dependence on a single commodity, and resentment of neighbors on which they depend due for their imports and exports. First Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah's sentiment that political independence should be accompanied by economic emancipation still rings true for Africa. The continent is still in the mental shackles of colonisation. How else can we explain our willingness to allow others to exploit Africa to advance their own agenda?

Well, it is not all gloom and doom. Since 1963, when the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was established, there have been several initiatives to address the challenges facing intra-African trade. These include the Lagos Plan of Action, the Abuja Treaty, the Constitutive Act establishing the African Union (AU), the New Economic Partnership

## EAST AFRICA'S TRUCKING CORRIDORS



for Africa's Development, and Agenda 2063. In addition to the continent-wide initiatives, all African states subscribe to one or more regional integration arrangements. Through these cooperation arrangements new transport corridors such as the Northern Corridor, the Southern Corridor, and the Western African Corridor are taking shape and have helped to lower the cost of doing business.

Regional economic communities have been at the forefront of championing intra-continental trade through protocols aimed at reducing tariff barriers. Like their counterparts in southern, central, and western Africa, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa) and the East African Community (EAC) have spearheaded and promoted transport corridor arrangements, including the concept of the One Stop Common Border Post (OSCBP).

## Transport corridor

Bilateral programmes such as the Standard Gauge Railway could potentially help in shaping new transport corridors, but must be accompanied with a robust trade facilitation programme. Throughout history, urbanisation and cities have developed along transport corridors. Concomitantly the location of industry has always been influenced by availability of power, communication, labour, access to markets, financial infrastructure, and raw materials.

Goods, including agricultural produce, automotive, chemicals, beverages, mining, and heavy machinery, vital for daily consumption, are transported by sea, railway, and road. Under the Programme for Infrastructure Development for Africa (PIDA), the continent has articulated a strategy to address the challenges.

African governments and multilateral agencies have made an effort to reduce tariffs, which are a barrier to trade. Next, the continent needs to tame non-tariff barriers, the biggest of which is the mindset.

Ambassador Erastus Mwencha is former Secretary-General of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and former Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission. He is current the chairman of TradeMark East Africa.

## THE PARTITION OF AFRICA

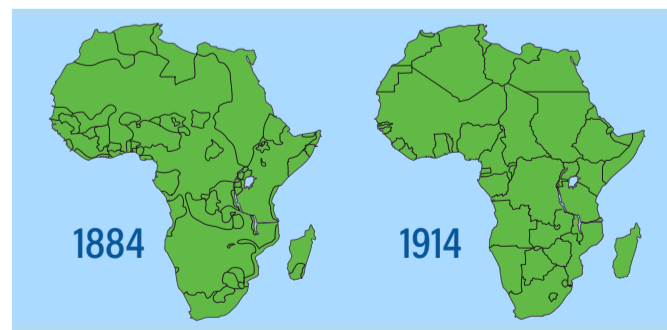


Illustration: Joseph Ngari

The Berlin Conference of 1884 portioned Africa into small colonial enclaves, leading to the creation of 55 African states, 17 of which are landlocked. The partition was intended to settle disputes in the scramble for African land among the colonial powers; it was certainly not for the benefit of Africans.



# Celebrating 60 years of Africa's future and progress

**Pictorial** Memories from the first Kusi Ideas Festival, which celebrated 60 years of Nation Media Group and Africa's collective independence. It was held in Kigali, Rwanda, last year



L-R (front) Felix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo; Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, and Moussa Faki, African Union Chairman, pose for a picture with members of the NMG Board of Directors.



L-R: Moussa Faki, African Union Chairman; Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda; Felix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo; and Raila Odinga, High Representative for Infrastructure Development at the African Union during the presidential roundtable.



Pictures: Pool

Sylvia Mulinge, Chief Customer Officer at Safaricom PLC; Dr Carlos Lopes, former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; Fredros Okumu, Director of Science, Ifakara Health Institute Tanzania and Donald Kaberuka, Chairman and Managing Partner, South-Bridge deliberate on a theme at the first edition of the Kusi Ideas Festival.



L-R: Dr Wilfred Kiboro, Nation Media Group Chairman; Prof Anyang' Nyong'o, Governor, Kisumu County; and Mrs Dorothy Nyong'o follow the proceedings at the conference. Picture: Pool

L-R: Diane Karusisi, Jacqueline Asimwe, and Dr Catherine Asimwe during the panel on Feeding Africa's Billions.



Nation Media Group Chair... the Kusi Ideas Festival at Rwanda, on December 8,





Isaac Oboth, Chief Executive Officer at Media256, paints a picture of the next 60 years in Africa before his session on The Wakanda Century.



Fatma Karume, Senior Partner, IMMMA Advocates Tanzania, speaks on media.



Graham Wood, Chief Executive Officer at Aga Khan Foundation, at the 2019 Kusi Ideas Festival.



Sarwat Hussain, Senior Adviser, Africa Media Initiative, emphasises a point during the discussion on The Promise and Pitfalls of Technology in Agriculture.



Nasim Devji (centre), DTB CEO, peruses a copy of The EastAfrican during a break. Looking on is former NMG GCEO and current DTB Chairman, Linus Gitahi.

Dr Azim Lakhani, Diplomatic Representative, Aga Khan Development Network, reads opening remarks from His Highness The Aga Khan, founder of the Nation Media Group. Picture: Courtesy

Peace Research Institute Oslo Research Assistant Bintu Sarah Zakor in discussion on Guarding Africa's Gates, Protecting Its Waters and Riches at the Kusi Ideas Festival last year. Picture: Joseph Kanyi





# We've unique opportunity to bridge digital divide and change our lives

**Usage gap** Most Africans get access to the internet through data from their cell phones, but the gap stands at a high of 49 per cent in 2019



ISAAC KWAKU FOKUO

One of the Kusi Ideas Festival's themes is "The Pandemic Taught Us That African Integration Is A Winner". Most of the instances of this integration have been physical – for example, the African Union preparing the continent to receive medical supplies and future vaccines, and African airlines moving desperately needed personal protective equipment (PPE) around the continent. What if the real winner here is when we can all come together online? What if we envisioned a "moonshot" for Africa that promises to bridge the digital divide and get millions of people online for the first time, knowing that when people are better connected, we can better manage the pandemic and become better prepared for our collective future?

According to the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development at Unesco, most Africans get access to the internet through data from their cell phones. However, the usage gap on the continent, or the percentage of people living inside mobile broadband coverage but not using mobile internet, stood at 49 per cent in 2019. Lack of digital skills and affordability are the two main drivers behind this gap – on average, one GB of data costs 9 per cent of monthly income in sub-Saharan Africa (the global standard is no more than 2 per cent). For many people across the continent, this puts getting online almost entirely out of reach.

Covid-19 has shown us in many ways that digital connectivity, particularly through our mobile phones, is crucial and that lack of it can have catastrophic effects. First, putting mobile data into people's hands allows them to get access to information on demand, beyond what is supplied by government notifications, and perhaps even cheaper.

While there are mechanisms to get information on the pandemic to people without the internet via SMS or USSD, this information comes at a per-message cost, which is sometimes out of reach for the majority of the population. Second, as the pandemic has forced school



Edward Njoroge, a senior teacher at Lavington Primary School, teaches using e-learning.  
Picture: File

closures and moved millions of children across the continent (and around the world) to online learning, lack of access to the internet is pushing millions of students in low-resource settings behind.

Third, diagnostic tools to monitor the spread of the virus and disseminate contact tracing information are often only available in Western markets - and even if they were available in sub-Saharan Africa, they would not be able to reach the

unconnected. Currently, despite some successes on the continent in monitoring the spread of the virus, governments in the Global South are spending millions of dollars and wasting time and human resources doing contact tracing manually at the expense of their own citizens.

There are examples from around the world about how we can leverage mobile data and technology, even for those getting online for the first time, to better manage the pandemic and prepare for a post-Covid future. First, using national portals, emergency SMS services, social media, and devoted pandemic response apps, governments can spread timely and correct information about outbreak statistics, travel restrictions, guidance on protection from the virus, and government responses to the pandemic.

We can look to Taiwan as an exemplar. From April to mid-August 2020, Taiwan registered no domestic cases of Covid-19, with all new cases arising from inbound travellers.

## Central data base

The country implemented a national contact tracing platform known as TRACE that handles case identification, contact identification, and contact health monitoring via phone and a central database. Their success in containing the pandemic has been heralded as a best practice for strategies for managing a future pandemic.

Second, internet access can both allow people to stay home, thus helping to contain the spread of the disease, and also formalise the informal economy, therefore creating innovations to con-

nect people to work. Amal, a Palestinian company, created an app that uses machine learning technology to connect construction workers to projects, eliminating the need for gatherings of labourers in densely populated areas to be selected for work. Such gatherings could be sites for the spread of Covid-19.

Third, access to mobile data can help diagnose and monitor the spread of the virus. In Nigeria, Wellvis created the Covid-19 Triage Tool, a free online product where people can self-score their risks of contracting the virus and then gain access to relevant information about prevention and care.

Luckily, there is no shortage of actors working to get people online on the continent in unique ways. Amp Global ("AMP"), headquartered in Mauritius and with a presence in Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Africa, is an example of an African company doing its part to bridge the digital divide, with the vision of getting 70 per cent of Africans on 4G data by 2025. AMP partners with telecommunication companies to offer free data rewards to users on its app in exchange for amplifying and promoting content from African artists, removing the cost barriers that prevent people from getting access to mobile internet in the first place.

## Cost barriers

AMP is also bridging the local content gap, developing demand-driven content that African consumers want and simultaneously training African artists on digital skills that are in high demand in the continent's job market. If AMP is successful in its vision and enables 75 per cent of Africa's population to get online, there is a potential for this to create 44 million additional jobs.

We cannot underestimate the democratisation of data and the power of the internet in the post-Covid future - just getting people connected opens up a world of possibilities that goes beyond getting a job. If you put data in the hands of people and allow them to do with it what they want, it will bring unprecedented opportunities.

Through the internet, ordinary people can create products, services, and content to meet their community needs as evidenced by the pandemic. However, connecting the unconnected costs money and the task ahead of us is massive. A recent report from the Broadband Commission estimates that around \$100 billion will be needed to achieve universal access to broadband connectivity in Africa.

Investing in digital skills and local content creation in the next 10 years alone will require \$18 billion. Although AMP is a model to look towards, the company and other actors like it cannot do the work of getting hundreds of millions of people online by themselves. Governments, telecommunication companies, private sector actors, international organisations, and civil society need to move out of their silos to co-create and invest in a digitally resilient, more interconnected post-Covid future for Africa.

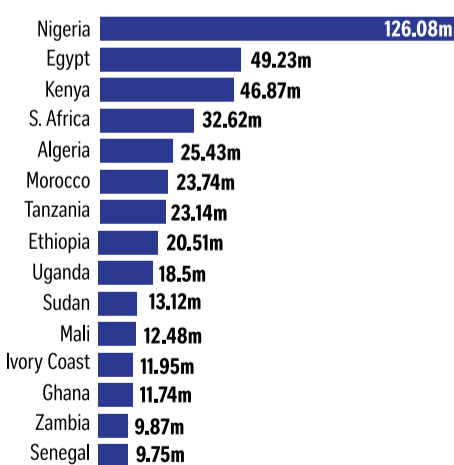
Isaac Kwaku Fokuo, Jr. Founder and Principal Botho Emerging Markets Group

## GROWTH

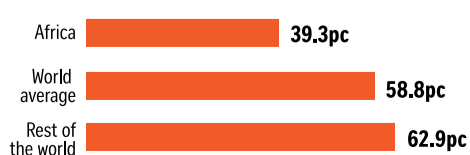
As at December 2019, Nigeria had more than 126 million internet users. Second-ranked Egypt had 49.23 million users. The majority of web traffic in leading digital markets in Africa originated from mobile devices - in Nigeria, one of the countries with the biggest number of internet users worldwide, 74 per cent of web traffic was generated via smartphones and only 24 per cent via PC devices. This is connected to the fact that mobile connections are much cheaper and do not require the infrastructure that is needed for traditional desktop PCs with fixed-line internet connections.

- Statista

## Internet users in selected countries in Africa ( June 2019)



## Internet Penetration per percentage of population (Q1-March 2020)



Source: statista



Taiwan implemented a national contact tracing platform known as TRACE



# Strong leadership fought Covid: next step is research

**Global response** Most of the research taking place for Covid-19 is happening in North America and Europe, yet Africa has a different genetic profile



MONIQUE WASUNNA



Health workers prepare to test their colleagues for Covid-19 at the Charlotte Maxeke Hospital in Johannesburg. Picture: AFP

African countries are still reeling from the effects of the measures taken to contain the spread of Covid-19. Though painful, they were a vital part of the successful public health response mounted by many African leaders.

The quick responses by most African countries meant that they were able to avoid the large-scale loss of life seen elsewhere.

The 1.8 million infections and 44,000 deaths recorded on the continent by mid-November are a great loss. They are, nevertheless, far from the catastrophic predictions made back in March and April.

But the fight is not yet over: the Africa Centres for Disease Control has recently warned of a fresh wave of infections, reporting almost 9,000 cases a day. With lockdowns easing and borders opening this figure will certainly rise.

If good public health measures helped Africa tackle its first Covid-19 wave, a response led by scientists and researchers must be central to any current and future threats. This was emphasised by several top African scientists gathered at a recent webinar convened to discuss next steps to contain the pandemic.

The strong leadership displayed by many African countries during the pandemic is certainly a lesson for others. But strong leadership needs good science. For Africa, this means that research for treatments and vaccines for Covid-19 must take place here, led by African scientists and tailored to this specific context.

Global solidarity might be lacking in the fight against Covid-19 but regional cooperation is not, especially in Africa. As the director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control, John Nkengasong, pointed out, "The continent came together very quickly"

Under his leadership, 55 health ministers gathered in Addis Ababa in Febru-

ary to develop a joint African strategy for the Covid-19 outbreak.

One of the decisions taken was to develop a platform to train 100,000 health workers and for the common procurement of diagnostic medical supplies. Called the Partnership to Accelerate Covid-19 Testing in Africa (PACT), the initiative was set up for multiple countries and has led to 12 million tests being conducted.

Many countries closed borders and implemented lockdowns. South Africa instituted one of the world's strictest. For its part the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) instituted a lockdown and suspended all flights into the country – the main way cases were being introduced.

## Testing capacity

A number of countries also developed impressive testing programmes. One was Senegal, whose Institut Pasteur in Dakar was one of only two laboratories with Covid-19 testing capacity when the pandemic began. Results are now available in hours. The country has also trained health workers elsewhere on the continent, and the Institut is developing home-test kits which should be available soon.

## FIGHTING EPIDEMICS

Research at the Institut Pasteur is based on four key strengths:

- Research conducted at all levels of life, from molecules to individuals and populations;
- Multidisciplinary strategies, focusing on molecular and cellular approaches as well as bioinformatics, biophysics, chemistry, and nanotechnologies;
- Unique technological facilities, including the most powerful microscope in the world (Titan); and
- An international network of 32 institutes, (the only one of its kind in the world), which is present on every continent).

In South Africa, an army of health workers with experience in HIV and tuberculosis were used as contact tracers for Covid-19.

Another feature of the response in some countries was getting the buy-in of communities. Steve Mundeke Ahuka, the incident manager for the Covid-19 outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, said the country drew on its past experience in managing the Ebola response.

This involved using social scientists and epidemiologists to study perceptions of Ebola in the community because of the distrust of outsiders. These insights were used to create and adapt communications to combat fake news and support vaccination and contact tracing. After two difficult years, the strategies paid off: over 300,000 people were vaccinated.

Similar strategies were used for Covid-19.

Most of the research taking place for Covid-19 is happening in North America and Europe. Large, well-organised clinical trials that were launched months ago are already saving lives.

This intensity of research is needed on the continent.



Health technicians work in the epidemic virus department of the Pasteur Institute of Ivory Coast near Abidjan. Picture: AFP

There are a number of reasons for this. The first is that Africa has a different genetic profile. According to Helen Rees, executive director of the Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute in South Africa, populations have different genetic backgrounds, and they are exposed to different infections such as HIV and malaria. We need to know if future vaccines will be safe and effective in our populations.

## Clinical trials

Another reason for more research on the continent is that it can help drive policy. As Borna Nyaoke Anoke, senior clinical project manager and medical manager at DNDi, argues: We need large, well-conducted, randomised clinical trials in Africa to support policy change for treatments.

One of the most urgent priorities is the need for treatment for mild to moderate cases to avoid mass hospitalisations, which would overwhelm already overburdened health systems.

The Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi) will soon be launching a large clinical trial with a number of African and European partners to fill this gap. A number of treatments that can be given to patients with mild symptoms will be tested.

Lastly, African countries need to be active in the research arena to ensure that they are not last in the queue for life-saving treatments and vaccines.

African countries have proved that they have the skills and expertise to provide local solutions to this global pandemic. They need to build on this success together to keep the pandemic at bay.

Dr Monique Wasunna is Director, Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative, Africa Regional Office, and Researcher, Kenya Medical Research Institute

Senegal's Institut Pasteur in Dakar was one of only two laboratories with Covid-19 testing capacity when the pandemic began



# Africa can turn the negative impacts of illness into a chance to build and strengthen itself

**Disruptive solutions** The pandemic has had a devastating effect on African economies. In order to move forward, we need to learn and change.



**NJUGUNA NDUNGU**

Despite the economic and social progress achieved in the past two decades, growth in most African countries remains characteristically fragile.

This affects the continent's economic, social, political, and cultural fabric and revolves around political instability; weak institutions that lead to poor accountability and leadership; civil and political unrest; low human development; low investment levels; and low levels of economic diversification.

No one was prepared for Covid-19 and its catastrophic effect on the global economy. It goes without saying that this pandemic was bound to hit African economies hard. Social and economic issues that were already facing grave challenges have now become exponentially more serious, posing a critical threat to the future growth and even survival of African economic systems.

Granted, Covid has severely effected all socio-political spheres of African life, but several sectors have played a significant role in enabling the harmful effect the virus has had on Africa. These include the continent's fiscal systems, the digital divide, healthcare systems, human capital, and urban infrastructure.

The weaknesses of Africa's fiscal systems have been amplified. The systems were already under pressure due to constrained taxation bases and policies, and

the debt situation. They were already buckling under the weight of global disruptions such as the United States-China tensions; the effect of Brexit on African supply chains and trade processes; and related financial flow difficulties.

The digital divide between Africa and the developed world has never been more evident. As the world is suddenly thrust into a situation where digitally-driven communication and processes are the only option, accessible and reliable internet and affordable data have become essential public services.

Most of Africa, with its poor digital infrastructure, will experience the harshest outcomes of the crisis. However, the good news is that disruptive solutions are sure to emerge. Countries such as Kenya, which has embraced electronic payment systems using e-money, will have an advantage, and could even design new systems to buttress the economy and social protection money transfer programmes.

## Healthcare system

Even then, such virtual programmes will face the challenge of designing initiatives that take into account the informal systems prevalent in African economies that make it difficult to identify and locate vulnerable groups that need the interventions the most.

Most African countries' healthcare systems are not equipped to deal with the basic needs of their populations and hardly receive the support and prioritisation they require. The pandemic has exposed the dire state of African healthcare, including lack of basic resources (such as protective wear for medical professionals and safe and suitable medical environments for patients).

Inefficiencies such as lack of adequate laboratory testing ability and capacity have impeded efforts to contain the virus. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted



The production of face masks at KICOTEC in Kitui, Kenya in April. The garment factory is the main producer of face masks and PPE gear in Kenya. It works 24 hours non-stop and produces more than 30,000 protective face masks per day. Picture: AFP

## RESEARCH

A Phase I clinical trial to assess the safety and immunogenicity of vaccine candidate TMV-083 (previously known as MV-SARS-CoV-2) began in France in August 2020. This is the first time the vaccine candidate, developed by Institut Pasteur scientists in partnership with Austrian biotech company Thémis and with the support of CEPI to tackle the Covid-19 epidemic, has been administered to humans.

Vaccine candidate TMV-083 is an attenuated live virus vaccine using the measles vaccine (MV) as a vector (or vehicle) and expressing a spike protein antigen from the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The spike protein, the "entry key" that allows the virus into cells, forms spikes all around the virus. The Institut Pasteur is the sponsor of this clinical trial. The trial is being conducted partly at the Cochin-Pasteur Clinical Investigation Centre (CIC) in Cochin Hospital (Paris Public Hospital Network - AP-HP) and partly in Belgium. A total of 90 healthy volunteers will be taking part in the study. They will receive two doses of the vaccine candidate.



Scientific staff members researching the coronavirus in a secure laboratory at the Pasteur Institute in Dakar. Early this year, the African Union designated it as one of two reference centres in Africa.

the pitfalls of failing to invest in skills development and learning infrastructure, both in schools and professional training.

With the pandemic forcing the closure of schools, most African communities have no access to educational materials due to lack of infrastructure, including digitisation. Many professionals who have access to digital tools do not have the skills to effectively work remotely during lockdowns and curfews. Skill shortages have worsened the effects of the virus on the economic and educational sectors.

The coronavirus has turned the spotlight on poor urban infrastructure such as overcrowded and unregulated public transportation systems, as well as weak social welfare systems.

An efficient public transport system is the cornerstone of urban development and expanding cities. Africa is painfully learning that an atomistic, disorganised, and small public transport system is a recipe for chaos, especially during a health crisis.

Granted, the pandemic has had a devastating effect on the fragile African economies, but the outlook does not need to be completely dire. In order to move forward, we need to learn from it and change. Our weaknesses have been starkly outlined.

We need to address them. One such outstanding weakness is African markets' reliance on imported goods (and services). This was illustrated by the dire shortage of masks and other medical and safety resources in the initial stages of the outbreak.

The pandemic had taught us that it is time to get serious about efforts such as the Intra-African Trade Agreement, which aims to bolster continental trade and development across all sectors, including manufacturing and distribution. The emphasis should be on allow-





# Transforming strategies to facilitate a post-Covid-19 era that's full of hope

While fast becoming a cliché, in a space of just nine months, the way of life of virtually the whole of humankind has changed. SARS-CoV-2 respects no geographic, gender, ethnic, or religious boundaries. Dealing with it has required coordinated efforts between the government, the commercial sector, civil society, and individuals.

On behalf of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), I would like to congratulate the Nation Media Group (NMG) on holding the second edition of the Kusi Ideas Festival – Towards a Post-Covid Africa, in these unprecedented times and under the most challenging of circumstances. NMG's resilience, flexibility, and ability to adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic is reflective of the capacity of AKDN agencies, of which NMG is one, to respond to crises beyond immediate interventions.

Founded by His Highness the Aga Khan, Imam (spiritual leader) of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, AKDN has a presence in over 30 countries, with its agencies operating in Africa in the sectors of education, health, finance, media, culture, tourism, and industry for nearly 100 years. Addressing complex issues in healthcare, education, and certainly during a pandemic, requires enormous resources and AKDN has a tradition of working with partners with mutual interests to produce mutually beneficial outcomes that improve the quality of life.

## Mutual interests

This has been evident in our response to the Covid-19 pandemic; AKDN has been working with its partners – governments, development banks, diplomatic donor agencies, and numerous organisations at international and national levels – to provide short and long-term strategic support to mitigate the harmful consequences of the pandemic.

The three key themes for the Kusi Festival this year are health; Africa's hidden strengths and resilience; and re-engineering Africa's future. During the festival, you will likely hear about some remarkable organisations and individuals that have



DR AZIM LAKHANI

responded to the challenges arising from the pandemic with innovation, creativity, tenacity, and ingenuity. Our own experience at AKDN includes examples of wide-scale adaptation by our agencies in multiple sectors to transform their business and programmatic models in re-

action to the pandemic.

In the health sector, AKDN through its Health Services and the University Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya, supported governments through the provision of isolation facilities, additional ICU beds, Covid-19 testing, personal protection equipment (PPE), and the training of thousands of doctors, nurses, and health-care workers in management and care protocols for Covid-positive patients. Recently, the Aga Khan University (AKU) and the Aga Khan Health Services in Kenya and Tanzania received a grant of six million euros from KfW, the German state-owned development bank, towards the purchase of PPE for health workers and Covid-19 test kits. Part of the grant will also fund a Covid-19 patient welfare programme.

Our media and educational institutions responded to and embraced the digital transformation that has taken place on a global scale: NMG launched its digital brand Nation.Africa and transformed its thought leadership series – the Nation Leadership Forum – into a digital platform; the Network's schools and university developed online curricula for distance

learning and the training of health workers; public education was conducted extensively through AKU's webinar series, with the participation of renowned subject matter experts; and Diamond Trust Bank (DTB) provided fast-tracked financial relief and a swift transition to cashless and online banking for thousands of its clients.

In the public domain, AKU is working with globally renowned partners for a rapid response in vaccine development, drug trials, and research to improve the care and management of Covid-19 patients; DTB signed an agreement with the International Finance Corporation for a \$50 million loan – part of IFC's fast-track Covid-19 global facility – to enable the bank to continue supporting its small and medium enterprise clients; and the Aga Khan Foundation, working with its partners, leveraged its extensive network of nearly 2,000 civil society organisations to channel online content on Covid-19 prevention measures, trained community groups to produce PPE, and provided food relief to thousands of vulnerable families and their communities.

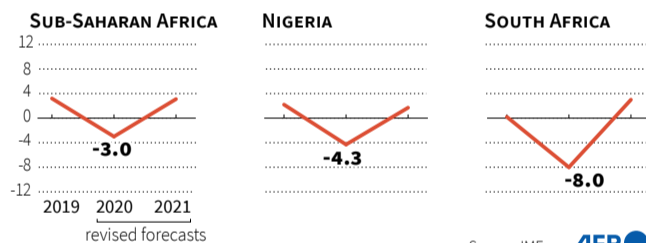
## Operational strategies

Although these are just some examples of the measures implemented by AKDN agencies over the past few months, all the agencies are transforming their programmatic and operational strategies to facilitate an emergence into a post-Covid-19 era over the next few years, from positions of sustainability and strength. As we anticipate a wide-scale rollout of Covid-19 vaccines and a hopeful return to a safer, albeit much changed world, AKDN will continue to work with its multi-level partners to support the continent's people and their development to engender self-reliance for all and to improve quality of life. All of this is underpinned by strong ethics and values, including compassion, concern for vulnerable people, generosity, and excellence.

Dr Azim Lakhani is the diplomatic representative of the Aga Khan Development Network Kenya.

## IMF GROWTH FORECASTS FOR AFRICA

Year-on-year GDP change in per cent, forecast as of October 2020



ing domestic production capabilities to take root, backed by strong institutional makeup that supports international trade and regional integration.

African decision and policymakers need to use this as a framework to build capacity for sustainability to strengthen socio-economic development across the continent. There is an urgent need for solutions that will move the continent forward, reduce risk, and maximise opportunities in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis.

Africa's actions in the aftermath of this social and economic crisis will guide the recovery and inclusive growth of the continent. We cannot predict the future, but we can be better prepared for the uncertainties that lie ahead.

Decisive, research-driven, and solution-orientated steps need to be taken to turn adversity into opportunity. While the full effects of the crisis have yet to be seen, African leaders need to start taking action to mitigate the negative impacts and work towards building and strengthening the continent. Africa will rise from this battle, and with the potential to be stronger than ever before.

Njuguna Ndung'u, AERC Executive Director, former Governor, Central Bank of Kenya



All of this is underpinned by strong ethics and values, including compassion, concern for vulnerable people, generosity, and excellence



The ICU at the Aga Khan University Hospital in Nairobi. Picture: File

50

Millions of dollars IFC lent to DTB to enable the bank to continue supporting its small and medium enterprise clients



# Creativity, innovation, and resilience; that is the answer of African youth to Covid-19

**Facing crisis** Millions of young Africans need support to gain the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to recover from the hard blows of the pandemic and build their future



PASSY AMAYO OGOLLA

Covid-19 has worsened problems both for the world and Africa. Sixty per cent of Africa's population is below the age of 25, which makes it the youngest continent, with a median age of 19. Young people are the continent's biggest resource, but they have been bruised by the pandemic in more ways than one.

## Unemployment

According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation 13.4 per cent of Africa's workforce between ages 15-24, roughly 16 million people, were facing unemployment in 2019. Even at the best of times, young people are most likely to be the first to lose their jobs or have to turn to low-quality, low-pay, and often unsafe jobs. In 2020, Covid-19 has exacerbated this as young people were laid off and a number of youth start-ups and enterprises collapsed because they could not meet governments' criteria for receiving economic stimulus packages. In the recovery phase of the pandemic response, start-ups and youth-dominated sectors will require concentrated support in the form of financing to help revive them.

## Increased Insecurity

What happens when a lot of young people are unemployed, out of school, and barely managing to survive? We have a few clues. First, reports of petty theft and house breakings have been on the rise. This Covid period has also seen an increase in domestic and gender-based violence at the household level, especially for young couples, and increased sexual abuse of young girls and boys. Second, as young people sought to beat the daily monotony of being young, energetic, out of school, and jobless, we have seen the outright breaking of Covid-19 restrictions and guidelines. This has meant increased law enforcement, increasing arrests of young people, and a decline in respect for rules that try to keep society on an even keel.



# 60pc

Africa's population below the age of 25. This makes it the youngest continent, with a median age of 19

## Education

According to Unesco, 74 per cent of global students have been affected by the pandemic. Along with many other countries, African education has been greatly affected by Covid-19 as students have been at home since its outbreak early this year. Even though many

learning institutions, especially the private ones, transitioned to online teaching and learning, many others in Africa are reluctant to invest in digital learning. One can understand why: Many schools, colleges, and universities simply do not have the infrastructure needed for remote learning. An estimated 89 per cent of learners in sub-Saharan Africa lack access to household computers with another 82 per cent lacking internet access. In some places learning has stopped completely and it is hard to tell if Africa's educational institutions will open again any time soon.

In addition, chronic poverty means many people do not have the necessary

Unemployed graduates of South Africa protest at Church Square in Pretoria on August 14, 2020. They demanded that the government create job opportunities and fill all vacancies. They also want to receive a monthly grant of 500 rand (about \$28). Picture: AFP

## E-LEARNING STARTS IN SCHOOLS

Students can now enjoy e-learning, thanks to Microsoft and the LG Corporation. The two firms in partnership with the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) have launched new model e-learning classrooms using virtual computers. The smart e-learning LG classrooms will use LG cloud monitors which allow for use of one personal computer in a multi-user environment.

Pupils of Diwapo Catholic Primary School in Nairobi at the official opening of a model classroom and the launch of LG Cloud Monitor at the Kenya Institute of Education. This is part of improving e-learning.



devices to successfully navigate an on-line classroom, let alone connect to on-line education. This is one of factors that adds to the difficulty of relying on digital education plans.

## Digital literacy

First, people who can acquire and use digital platforms for work and learning already have the required education and skills. Outside this group, there is limited education, leaving many unable to get access to digital learning. The need to increase digital literacy and build digital capacity among Africans has revealed itself during this pandemic period. On a positive note, young Africans have been working independently to deepen their digital literacy, often becoming the channels through which others can also receive the skills.

## Access to the internet

Africa has some of the most expensive internet costs around the world, making many online webinars and classes for young people practically inaccessible. Even if they could afford an internet connection, many do not have sufficient internet bandwidth to support their participation. There is also the increased cost of trying to study or do business online, or attend webinars. According to Rebecca Enonchong, the founder and CEO of AppsTech, the median of 1GB of data in Africa costs about \$7.04, with some countries registering a cost of more than \$20 per GB of data. A single Zoom meeting costs approximately 540MB to 1.63 GB of data per hour. As a result, many young Africans are losing out on.....

## Access to electricity

About 600 million people in Africa still don't have access to electricity. Yet reliable and affordable power is an important component for young people who must now work or study from home. Sadly, millions of young people cannot use their laptops or other digital devices due to unreliable and unaffordable power, forcing many to seek alternative sources for charging their devices. Many have been frustrated as a reliable electricity connection allows people to ensure that their days are well used and that they can manage the transition to digital learning and working spaces. It is critical to mention that the Covid-19 period has coincided with disconnection of power for millions of people unable to pay their bills. This means that many children cannot continue their lessons.

## Slowed, but not stopped

Despite the pandemic and its impacts, African youth continue to demonstrate resilience, creativity, and the spirit of innovation and enterprise. As we journey towards a post-Covid-19 Africa, it is critical that millions of young Africans are supported with the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to recover from the hard blows of the pandemic. This will not only benefit them personally, it will also build a strong foundation for all of us as we face future crises.

Passy Amayo Ogolla is Programme Manager at the Society for International Development in East Africa.



# Low infection and death rates perplex scientists

The fear was rooted in the belief that most African countries, with overstretched and underfunded health systems, would not be able to cope

## Q&A

### Catherine Kyobutungi

*The World Health Organisation's Africa regional office was predicting up to 190,000 deaths and between 29 million and 44 million infections in the first year of the pandemic alone. However, this was not to be. What were these assumptions based on, and what has made Africa different?*

When Covid-19 began to spread globally at an alarming rate, many institutions and scientists felt a sense of apprehension and fear for the African continent. Their fear was rooted in the belief that most African countries had overstretched and underfunded health systems, combined with the large numbers of people with infectious and non-infectious diseases that the continent was already grappling with. So the predicted figures came as no surprise.

However, whilst Africa accounts for 17 per cent of the global population, it only has 3.4 per cent of the reported global Covid-19 cases and a similar margin of deaths. This has come as a shock to the world, especially when it became clear that the numbers in Africa were much lower than any other continent. In hindsight, many were quick to forget the experience the continent has had managing previous outbreaks including HIV/Aids, Ebola, cholera, malaria, and even polio and measles for the younger population.

Several African countries have experienced Ebola outbreaks, the largest having occurred in 2014 in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and a couple of neighboring countries. The approach of hygiene, testing, and isolating cases and tracing contacts that has been successfully used during Ebola outbreaks came in handy when Covid-19 came to the continent. Many countries already had the necessary experience and infrastructure to be quickly mobilised and deployed.

Additionally, Africa reacted faster in efforts to curb the disease than any European country or the US. The fact that the virus spread to the African continent later than other regions gave us the time "to learn and unlearn" before it was too late. We had the benefit of time, which allowed us to see the consequences of late action. We saw the devastating consequences the outbreak had on health care systems in Italy and Spain. More importantly, we could also see that a different outcome was possible with quick action. South Korea and Vietnam were already posting much better results than Italy and Spain. This was definitely an added advantage in fighting the pandemic. The rate of the spread and the level of impact of the outbreak was recognised early, and pre-



ventative measures could be put in place at an early stage. Countries that quickly deployed surveillance measures were those that were still doing Ebola surveillance at points of entry due to the outbreak that was still ongoing in DRC.

*Many believe that African countries are reporting low rates of infection due to their limited testing capacity. Could this be the reason the figures from the continent seem exceptionally low, in comparison to the global North?*

It is not a secret that several African countries have been facing a shortage of testing kits, thus raising concerns that the continent's relatively low number of reported Covid-19 cases was and is still due to lack of testing. The lack of adequate testing is however not just an African phenomenon. With the exception of a handful of countries in Asia, many countries are grappling with this. Ideally anyone who needs a test should get it, but this is not the case.

Without mass testing in countries like Italy, Spain, UK, and USA the number of cases have overwhelmed health care systems. One could argue that if there were tens of thousands of undetected cases in African countries, the severe cases would have already overrun the health facilities. This is not the case so far.

So can we really trust the statistics from African governments? In reality, this will vary from country to country based on their ability and method of testing large numbers and the phase of the outbreak they are in. One can never tell whether all cases are being detected, however the numbers are more likely to be closer to what is being reported

than the millions predicted. Countries are doing surveillance and testing cases of acute respiratory illnesses, targeted testing in high-risk groups such as frontline healthcare workers, truck drivers, and law enforcement. Additional testing is done for contacts of cases. Test positivity rates (the percentage of cases out of the number of tests conducted) vary widely across the region. Rates above 5 per cent are of concern because they indicate widespread transmission.

*How did African countries' public health response to the pandemic differ from the larger global response? And did this play a role in curbing the spread of the virus?*

The continent's response preceded the reporting of cases by many weeks. Countries instituted checks at ports of entry, started tracking travellers from high-risk countries and public education campaigns as early as late January/early February. Most African countries had already established Ebola national task forces; a few in East Africa were still doing Ebola surveillance, so it was easy to repurpose their disease surveillance systems. In Sierra Leone, which was ravaged by the Ebola virus, lessons from the Ebola pandemic were implemented to curb the spread of Covid-19. One of these was the declaration of a state of emergency throughout the country starting from March 25, 2020, even before the first case of Covid-19 was reported in the country. Several countries banned large gatherings and closed schools before even the first case was detected.

This means that countries were already in response mode when the first

cases were reported and were not caught flat-footed, as has been seen in the worst-hit countries in the North. The Africa CDC and WHO have also been instrumental in quickly developing tools and protocols that countries could use to make choices on the most suitable interventions based on the stage of the outbreak in each country. One key feature of the response of Africa is the strength of regional institutions like Africa CDC and WHO Afro – the coordinated approach and the fact that African countries actually took their advice.

*Some scientists believe that Africa has been spared the brunt of the virus due to reasons that include a larger youth population, regular exposure to other infectious diseases, and even genetics. What's your take on these assumptions?*

While they might be true, such assumptions are also grounded in the belief that Africans have no agency and things happen to us because of factors outside our control. There have been several other hypotheses floated around, including the hot weather, BCG vaccination, and cross-immunity from other coronaviruses. There are many factors that could explain why Africa has been spared the worst of the pandemic. First and foremost, we must give credit where it is due: That our governments acted first (or fast??) and prevented the virus from spreading uncontrolled before taking serious measures. Second, we must give credit to our regional bodies for reacting quickly and providing advice and guidance to our governments. Third, we must give credit to the African scientists who have been advising governments and customising the response to local contexts. Fourth, we must give credit to the Africans who have taken measures to slow down the spread – hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and social distancing. This has come at a great cost to people's social, economic, and mental well-being. We should never minimise that.

Now back to the other theories: Of course the youthful population may mean that most Covid-19 cases have no symptoms or are mild and hence are out there in the community undetected. The hot weather may slow down the spread since the virus may not survive as long in hot as in cold weather. The social interactions in majority of African communities are different. Work in rural areas means walking to the field with one's family and spending the day outdoors – not taking a crowded commuter train to work in a closed space with strangers. Another plausible theory is that Africans may have what is called cross-immunity, where previous exposure to other coronaviruses has made our bodies resistant to this particular one. The jury is still out there on some of these theories.

For now, I want to go with the agency and ingenuity of Africans – it's what has brought us this far and it is what will see us through the worst of this pandemic.

Catherine Kyobutungi is the Executive Director, Africa Population and Health Research Centre



**Most African countries had already established Ebola national task forces**



# Over 2.2 million Covid-19 cases, 52,600 deaths in Africa

**NATION**  
NEWSPLEX

**Confirmed cases**  
**2,203,419**

**Active cases**  
**272,486**

**Deaths**  
**52,610**

**Recovered**  
**1,878,323**

