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# Africa After COVID-19

## Lessons for a More Resilient Continent

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With a foreword by Dr Greg Mills

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## Foreword

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted Africa's perennial development and governance challenges. From strained healthcare systems to fragile and commodity-dependent economies, the crisis has thrown the continent into a recession for the first time in a quarter of a century and created widespread economic upheaval.

The crisis offers a moment for African leaders and policymakers not only to reflect on the ensuing health and economic challenges, but should demand a review of why the continent remains so vulnerable to such events.

While there is much to learn from the continent's shortcomings in the wake of the crisis, there are also positive signs of growth and reasons for optimism.

Firstly, Africa has recorded the lowest COVID-19 death count of any continent. Institutions such as the African Union and African Development Bank have demonstrated the value that multilateralism offers in playing a leading role in co-ordinating the continent's response to the pandemic and supporting governments through financial mechanisms. Consequent disruptions to global supply chains have also highlighted new opportunities for commerce on the continent, including local industrialisation for key products and goods.

While such relative success stories provide reason to celebrate, governments cannot become complacent; there cannot be a return to 'business as usual' in the aftermath of this crisis.

This is because COVID-19 is just one of many crises in which Africa – and

the world – will face over the coming years: From climate change, to population growth, and increasing competition over scarce resources. The next crisis is coming, and it is imperative that African governments are prepared if they wish to mitigate large-scale damage.

The COVID-19 crisis should therefore be seen as an opportunity to learn from the policy missteps of the past and better prepare for the future. As this paper illustrates, African governments and policymakers can achieve this by focusing their attention around five key areas, namely: preparation, context, robustness, collaboration, and leadership.

Resilience is key to Africa's future growth and success. Read this paper and learn how to prepare for the next crisis.



**Dr Greg Mills**  
Director, The Brenthurst Foundation

| Focus                | Actions  |  |  |
|----------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Preparation</b>   | Develop appropriate risk management systems  | Establish a dedicated fund which can only be utilised during a government-declared crisis              | Invest in futureproofing initiatives   |
| <b>Context</b>       | Identify the crisis and triage the country to determine the most vulnerable citizens and areas | Create tailored strategies which address the crisis while causing limited disruption to the status quo | Monitor constantly and adapt accordingly   |
| <b>Robustness</b>    | Double-down on diversification efforts   | Promote domestic manufacturing   | Support private sector growth  |
| <b>Collaboration</b> | Strengthen regional blocs and actors   | Supplement internal shortcomings with domestic, regional and international support.                    | Catalyse the implementation of integration frameworks and plans                  |
| <b>Leadership</b>    | Look beyond party politics and prioritise the country  | Ensure government actions – such as spending and procurement – are transparent.                        | Engage with the public on a regular basis to assuage fears and instil confidence |

## Introduction

As COVID-19 spread across the world during the first half of 2020, there was much concern around Africa's preparedness and capacity to manage a health crisis of such magnitude. With its densely populated cities, limited healthcare resources and expertise, and an economic landscape which is highly susceptible to external shocks, many believed COVID-19 would have a catastrophic impact on the continent. It was therefore never a question of if COVID-19 would impact Africa, rather, how big would the impact be.

When evaluating the impact today, the results are mixed. The number of deaths—currently 50,417 at the time of writing—is far below those seen elsewhere and in epidemiological forecasts. While there is no definitive answer, many have attributed the continent's low death count to its demographic makeup, climate, and previous experience with health crises.<sup>1 2</sup> The economic situation paints a different picture, however.

While global growth is projected at -4.4% in 2020 (falling from 2.8% in 2019), Sub-Saharan Africa is forecasted to see growth fall to -3% for the year (declining from 3.2% in 2019). Commodity-dependent countries and those reliant on tourism are projected to be the hardest-hit, with growth expected to contract, on average, by more than 4 percentage points in 2020. The resulting impact of this economic regression is a drop in real per capita income of 5.3% across the continent and an economic recession for the first time in a quarter of a century.<sup>3</sup>

Africa's experience with COVID-19 ultimately serves as a watershed moment in how the continent, its governments and institutions choose to prepare for future crises. This comes as COVID-19 has

highlighted many of Africa's weaknesses: from weak fiscal reserves and a lack of economic diversification, to fragile supply chains and strained healthcare facilities. A return to 'business as usual' is not an option – there must be reform.

As the recent pandemic has illustrated, crises can occur at very short notice and have cascading effects across the world. African governments and policymakers therefore need to be aware of the continent's shortcomings in the face of COVID-19 and understand how they can better prepare for the next crisis. Their response should not be to wait until the next crisis presents itself, but to ensure that the correct measures are in place to mitigate any potential threat.

Drawing from the continent's experiences with COVID-19 at both a national and regional level, this policy brief aims to provide a series of recommendations for African governments and policymakers which will equip them with a robust set of tools and best practices to mitigate the threat of future crises, whatever they may be.

## COVID-19 Has Highlighted Africa's Perennial Weaknesses

In his foreword for the *African Economic Outlook 2020* report, Dr Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank (AfDB), began by saying that "Africa's economic outlook continues to brighten", and described how the continent's annual real GDP growth is projected to accelerate to 3.9% in 2020 and 4.1% in 2021.<sup>4</sup>

Six months later and as part of a COVID-19 supplement, the revised report painted a different picture entirely: a real GDP contraction of between 5.6 and 7.3 percentage points, GDP losses ranging from \$173.1 billion to \$236.7 billion in

2020–2021, and worsening sovereign debt burdens.<sup>5</sup>

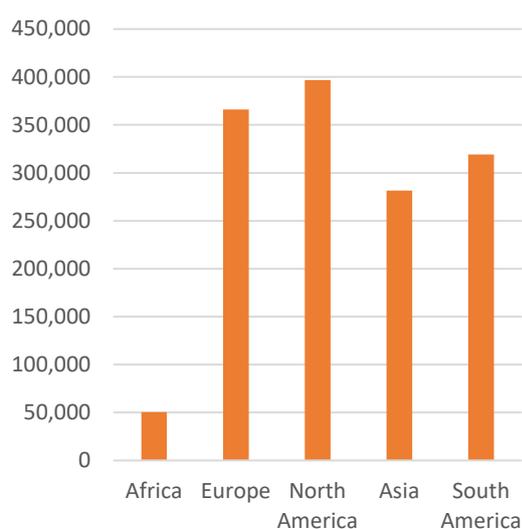
This dramatic shift is the result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic backlash which has added a new layer of complexity to Africa’s development challenges, hindering and in some instances reversing many positive signs of growth.

No country or region has escaped the pandemic’s economic backlash. However, Africa has been particularly hard-hit.

Despite recording a relatively low death count when compared with the rest of the world (see Figure 1), COVID-19 has upended Africa’s economy and threatened millions of livelihoods. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected real GDP growth to fall to -3% for 2020, ushering in a continent-wide recession for the first time in a quarter of a century. This economic disruption is primarily the result of the continent’s economic landscape and makeup.

**Figure 1:** Total Number of Recorded COVID-19 Deaths, 25 November 2020

Source: Worldometer



As lockdowns came into effect across the world, there was a dramatic reduction in trade, manufacturing, and

travel, all of which led to a reduced demand for commodities. While the negative effects of this slowdown were felt across the world, they were pronounced in Africa due to its trade profile being dominated by commodities such as oil, minerals, and agricultural products. With trade partners such as China and India – both of whom account for a combined 22.7% of all African exports – halting production during the first half of 2020, many African economies suffered as a result.

Commodity-dependent countries such as Nigeria and Angola, both of whom rely almost entirely on oil as their primary export commodity, have been particularly hard-hit. For Nigeria, crude oil accounts for an estimated 90% of the country’s foreign exchange and 60% of government revenue.

With the price of oil reaching a low of \$18 per barrel in April and climbing to \$40 in October (in December 2019 the price was \$60 per barrel), Nigeria is expected to see growth contract by 4.4% in 2020 while in other oil-dependent countries such as Libya and Equatorial Guinea, growth is forecasted to contract by as much as 25.4% and 9.2% respectively.

Other commodities have also been impacted as a result of COVID-19. A disruption to global supply chains has seen coffee prices fluctuate, presenting an enormous challenge to coffee growers, farm workers, and downstream value chain actors on the continent.<sup>6</sup> Gold fell to levels similar to those seen during the 2008 crisis, while silver plummeted to its lowest price in 11 years due to a lower industrial demand.<sup>7</sup>

The decline in global travel has also proven devastating for many of Africa’s tourism-dependent economies. The continent is home to the world’s second-

**Table 1:** Sub-Saharan Africa Public Debt Indicators (% of GDP)Source: IMF, *Global Economic Outlook database*

Note: Current projections are based on October 2020 data

|                                    | Pre-COVID-19 Projections | Current Projections |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Public Debt</b>                 |                          |                     |
| Sub-Saharan Africa                 | 56.4                     | 65.6                |
| Oil exporters                      | 50.4                     | 68.5                |
| Other resource-intensive countries | 45.8                     | 52.7                |
| Non-resource-intensive countries   | 65.9                     | 73.3                |
| <b>Government Revenue</b>          |                          |                     |
| Sub-Saharan Africa                 | 19.5                     | 17.6                |
| Oil exporters                      | 20.4                     | 16.8                |
| Other resource-intensive countries | 18.0                     | 16.4                |
| Non-resource-intensive countries   | 20.1                     | 18.6                |
| <b>Debt-Service-to-Revenue</b>     |                          |                     |
| Sub-Saharan Africa                 | 21.9                     | 32.3                |
| Oil exporters                      | 30.1                     | 76.3                |
| Other resource-intensive countries | 21.8                     | 29.1                |
| Non-resource-intensive countries   | 19.0                     | 21.8                |

fastest-growing tourism sector and accounts for 8.5% of Africa's GDP. Not only has COVID-19 brought the tourism sector to a standstill due to the reduction in global travel, but it has also had a ripple effect across many other economic activities which are reliant on tourism, including hospitality, entertainment, and logistics. Countries such as Mauritius and Seychelles, where tourism accounts for more than 10% of GDP, have been among the hardest hit and are forecasted to experience growth contractions of 7.5% and 10.5% respectively.

The downturn in economic activity caused by COVID-19 has also placed strain on already deteriorating government revenues. This deterioration is most prevalent in commodity-dependent countries where there has been a significant reduction in exports (see Table 1).

Unlike their more developed counterparts, African governments do not

have the fiscal tools to adequately mitigate large economic setbacks such as those witnessed during the COVID-19 crisis, and while many governments have triggered expansionary fiscal policy responses out of necessity, the outcome will be a widening of fiscal deficits on the continent.<sup>8</sup>

Public debt levels in Sub-Saharan Africa were expected to gradually decline prior to the pandemic, but this is set to reverse as a result of lower GDP growth. This could potentially prove calamitous for several African economies: prior to COVID-19 the IMF classified nine African economies as being at high risk of debt distress, while seven were already in debt distress.<sup>9</sup>

The crisis has once again highlighted the many fragilities across Africa's economic landscape. Although there are regions which are projected to experience larger real GDP contractions this year – Europe at 7% and the Middle

East and Central Asia at 4.1% – Africa’s experiences and path to recovery are likely to be more difficult.

This comes as Africa is home to many large informal economies which account for roughly 85.6% of all employment on the continent.<sup>10</sup> For the millions of Africans who operate in this environment, a daily income is necessary in order to support themselves and their families. The majority lack access to savings or formal means of financial support, therefore increasing their vulnerability during times of crisis. While real GDP is expected to contract by -3% in 2020, this does not illustrate the hardship and economic despair which many will endure across the continent.

It is especially concerning that the IMF predicts the COVID-19 pandemic will wipe out almost 10 years of development progress on the continent.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to its fragile economic landscape, COVID-19 has also highlighted the dire state of healthcare across much of Africa.

A key challenge faced by many African countries is a shortage of healthcare expertise. This is particularly challenging in countries such as Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Liberia, and Mozambique where there are fewer than ten physicians per 10,000 people.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to expertise, there is also a lack of medical resources. Prior to COVID-19, Ghana had only two hundred ventilators for its population of 30 million; Somalia had nineteen; and Mauritania had one.<sup>13</sup>

Much of this is the result of poor financing and waning levels of commitment towards public healthcare. In 2001, African leaders signed the Abuja Declaration, voluntarily pledging to allocate a minimum of 15% of each country’s national budget to health. In

2013 it was reported that only three countries had attained the percentage pledged: Botswana, Rwanda, and Zambia.<sup>14</sup>

As such, the continent is home to several of the world’s worst-ranking countries according to the Global Health Security Index (GHS). The GHS, which assesses the capabilities of 195 countries to prevent, detect, and respond to biological threats, has identified 28 of the world’s least prepared countries to be in Africa, with Gabon (186), Somalia (194) and Equatorial Guinea (195) among the worst.<sup>15</sup>

It is no surprise then, that in May, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated between 83,000 to 190,000 deaths could occur across 47 African countries this year due to COVID-19,<sup>16</sup> meanwhile the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) forecasted between 300,000 and 3.3 million deaths.<sup>17</sup>

While Africa has recorded a low COVID-19 death count relative to other regions of the world,<sup>18</sup> the pandemic has highlighted the poor state of the continent’s healthcare systems and the urgent need for reform.

Indeed, even in regions where healthcare infrastructure is more developed, such as the UK (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the GHS), France (11) and the US (1), the impact of COVID-19 has been severe. Should Africa experience a pandemic with a high case-fatality rate, it is likely that the continent’s existing healthcare infrastructure will collapse under the strain.

When assessing the impact of COVID-19, it should ultimately serve as a wake-up call for governments across Africa; a watershed moment in the continent’s approach towards mitigating future crises and their impact.

With an understanding of the impact and scale that a crisis such as

COVID-19 can have, governments and policymakers across the continent need to adopt a proactive approach towards mitigating the next crisis. This is particularly important as the threat of climate change worsens, populations grow, and political tensions intensify.

## 5 Lessons for Creating a More Resilient Africa

No matter the crisis, leaders have two equally important responsibilities: solve the immediate problem and keep it from happening again.<sup>19</sup>

As COVID-19 has demonstrated, crises can erupt at very short notice and have cascading effects across the world. The need for vigilance and preparedness is therefore paramount.

African governments have an important role to play in mitigating future crises. While much can be gleaned from the responses to COVID-19 elsewhere in the world, it is important to promote solutions which are tailored for Africa, by Africa. This will require strong commitment from individual governments as well as collaboration at both a bilateral and multilateral level.

In seeking to strengthen resilience and mitigate the threat of future crises, African governments need to act upon five key lessons from the recent COVID-19 crisis.

### 1. Preparation is Paramount

The COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a crisis of vision and planning. The first, and perhaps most important lesson, is to therefore be prepared for the next crisis, whatever it may be. Two examples illustrate the need for preparation.

When oil prices in Nigeria plummeted at the height of the COVID-19 crisis in early 2020, attention immediately turned to the

country's Excess Crude Account (ECA) – a stability mechanism which utilises saved oil rents for periods of economic downturn. The account has historically been effective, as it was used to pay off the Paris club debt while also fund several ambitious projects.

Over the years, however, it has become a presidential purse and a go-to destination for the financing of elections, leading it to be ranked as one of the most poorly governed sovereign wealth funds in the world.<sup>20</sup> As such, when the Nigerian government sought to offset the financial ramifications of COVID-19 in July, they were greeted by a fund which contained a meagre \$72.4 million – a far cry from 2008 when the ECA contained an estimated \$22 billion.

In Central and Western Africa – the same areas which were devastated by Ebola in recent years – the COVID-19 virus was met with an impressive level of preparedness. In Sierra Leone, for example, this level of preparedness was a direct result of its experiences with Ebola: the crisis equipped the country with a mindset of urgency when confronting a health crisis, the training and protocols to contain the spread of a virus, and perhaps most importantly, an appreciation by the citizenry for government-imposed rules.

Indeed, prior to there being any confirmed COVID-19 cases in Sierra Leone, the government had already begun to conduct training exercises while also deploying supplies to strategic locations in the country. At the time of writing, Sierra Leone has only recorded 2406 cases and 74 deaths – among the lowest in Africa.

Both examples demonstrate how preparedness – and a lack thereof – can impact a government's response to a crisis. COVID-19 therefore serves as a

watershed moment in how African governments view and prepare for crises. As such, African governments must:

***Develop appropriate risk management systems.*** Governments need to ensure that the necessary tools, expertise, and resources are available and on standby in the event of a crisis. This requires investment in improved facilities and surveillance systems. Routine exercises and training simulations are necessary to ensure preparedness among all key stakeholders. Reliable risk management systems will ultimately act proactively rather than reactively.

***Establish a dedicated fund which can only be utilised during a government-declared crisis.*** It is imperative that governments can offset the financial ramifications of a crisis as best they can. This will include financing relief measures for individuals and businesses, emergency infrastructure, and the deployment of personnel through a dedicated fund. Learning from the Nigerian ECA, the fund will ideally be administered as a joint public-private initiative and made subject to annual audits. Government must allocate a percentage of its revenue towards the fund.

***Invest in futureproofing initiatives.*** The crisis of tomorrow requires planning and action today. In addition to risk management systems, governments need to focus their attention on investing in initiatives which will enable them to withstand future crises more effectively. Many of these investments are significant in both size and cost. For example, economies which are reliant on agriculture must increase investments in agribusiness and resilient crop variants to mitigate the

threat of climate change, while adequate spatial planning and infrastructure is necessary in areas where exponential population growth and urbanisation are expected.

## 2. Context Matters When Confronting a Crisis

Lockdowns have become a commonly used measure by governments across the world to contain the spread of COVID-19. But while the lockdowns are designed to contain the spread of COVID-19 and in doing so, save lives, in Africa they have had an adverse effect on the economic livelihoods of many citizens.

One of the earliest responders on the continent was South Africa. Serving as Africa's second-largest economy, South Africa was quick to implement a national lockdown on 27 March. Described as one of the strictest in the world, the lockdown required citizens to stay at home for a period of fourteen days – with an exception for essential workers and those traveling to purchase groceries and medical supplies. The government began easing the lockdown incrementally using a 5-level system.

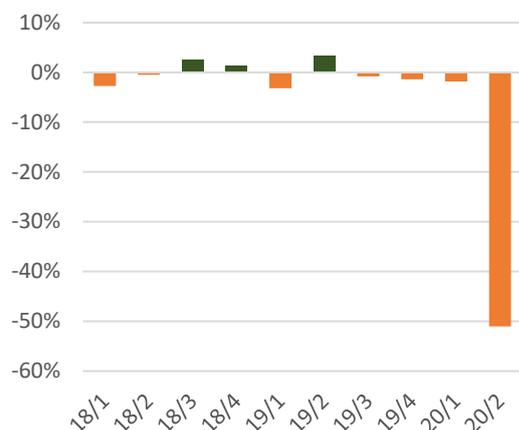
When assessing the economic impact of the country's lockdown, the results are dire. Figure 3 shows the dramatic impact that a strict lockdown had on the country's economy, as GDP growth plummeted by 51% (annualised quarter-over-quarter) during the second quarter. Given that lockdown regulations restricted the movement of people, thousands of businesses were forced to pause operations which led to a dramatic reduction in the number of people commuting to work and by extension, led to a downturn in manufacturing and trading (see Figure 4).

Those sectors which could adapt quickly and incorporate remote working protocols (i.e. finance) were able to

mitigate large financial loss, but they too were impacted by the lockdown.

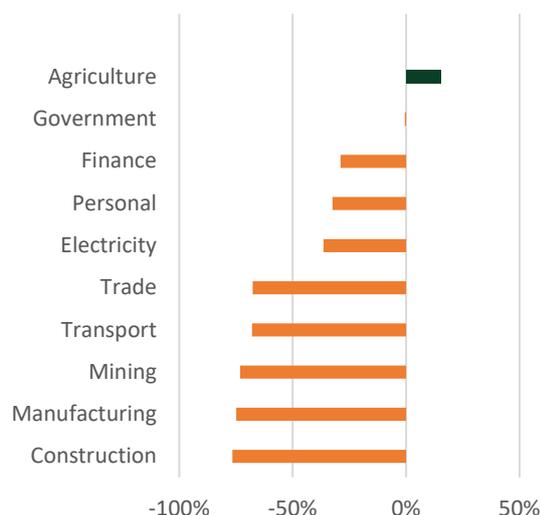
**Figure 3:** South Africa’s Growth in GDP Between Q1 2018 and Q2 2020 (% annualised)

Source: Statistics South Africa



**Figure 4:** Industry Growth in Q2 2020 Compared with Q1 2020 (% annualised)

Source: Statistics South Africa



The South African government chose to implement a one-size-fits all lockdown which targeted every citizen in the country, irrespective of their income bracket, age, or location. As a result, employment fell by 2.2 million jobs, or 14%, in the second quarter of 2020.<sup>21</sup>

Context is therefore key and understanding both the crisis itself and the makeup of a country’s society and the nuances which underscore it are important when acting. It is precisely this nuance and variation which governments must consider in responding to future crises. This can be achieved through the following actions:

**Identify the crisis and triage the country to determine the most vulnerable citizens and areas.** Responding successfully to a crisis first entails understanding what the crisis is and who is most at risk. In the case of COVID-19, while extremely infectious, it only poses a severe threat to a specific demographic: the elderly and those with comorbidities. For every 1,000 people infected with COVID-19 who are under the age of 50, almost none will die, meanwhile for every 1,000 people in their mid-seventies or older who are infected, around 116 will die.<sup>22</sup> Understanding the nature of the crisis and the threat it poses allows the government to isolate the threat and deploy its resources accordingly.

**Create tailored strategies which address the crisis while causing limited disruption to the status quo.** With an understanding of the crisis and the threat it poses, governments must deploy targeted strategies aimed at resolving the crisis while minimising collateral damage or disruption. Rather than impose a one-size-fits-all strategy, governments need to adopt a modular and triaged approach towards the crisis. For example, in addition to encouraging isolation for the elderly and individuals with comorbidities, the South African government could have imposed a lockdown on the formal economy and encourage remote working, while allowing for the informal economy to continue its normal operation. This would

allow the country's most economically vulnerable to continue earning an income, making it a strategy which saves both lives and livelihoods.

***Monitor constantly and adapt accordingly.***

The nature of a crisis is that it is in constant flux. COVID-19 demonstrates this phenomenon as new hotspots appear, forecasts are altered, and anomalies arise. Governments need to be prepared to respond to changes with flexibility and agility. The most effective way to ensure this is using data. Governments need to ensure that they are constantly gathering reliable and up-to-date data. This can either be the responsibility of an existing statistics bureau or specialised crisis department. The objective is to execute decisions which are analytically sound and rational.

### **3. Robust Economies Help Weather the Storm**

The economic ramifications of COVID-19 on Africa have proven devastating. Those economies which are reliant on commodities and tourism have been particularly hard-hit.

In countries such as Cabo Verde, Seychelles and Comoros, tourism inflows are not expected to return to 2019 levels until 2023.<sup>23</sup>

Due to the global economic slowdown caused by COVID-19, remittance inflows to Africa are expected to fall by 23% in 2020. In 2019, remittance inflows to Africa – money sent from expatriates to their home countries – were an estimated \$47.9 billion, or 2.7% of the continent's GDP. In countries such as Lesotho and Gambia remittances form an integral part of the economy, contributing towards 24% and 16% of GDP, respectively. The importance of remittances is perhaps best highlighted

by the fact that they outweigh foreign direct investment (FDI) to Africa.

For many African citizens, remittances serve as a vital lifeline which enables them to purchase key necessities such as food and clothing while for others, they provide an opportunity to invest in education and entrepreneurial ventures.

While no economy can survive a crisis unscathed, governments can take appropriate measures now to ensure that the economic effects of a crisis are greatly diminished. This should see governments:

***Double-down on diversification efforts.*** The clarion call for economic diversification across Africa has been sounding for years. Governments need to use the COVID-19 crisis as a catalyst in their economic diversification efforts. This should see them focus particularly on reallocating resources to new activities and industries; investing in reskilling; offering an attractive incentive framework for investors; and attracting senior foreign skills to assist with oversight and management of the above. While not immune to economic shocks, diverse and sophisticated economies are better equipped at weathering a crisis.

***Promote domestic manufacturing.*** In conjunction with improving diversification efforts, governments need to consider establishing local production centres for specific goods, rather than relying on importing them. In many instances, African countries already have access to the raw materials necessary for production (i.e. rubber is used in the production of PPE equipment such as masks). By producing key goods and products locally, governments can hedge against a slowdown or complete disruption to global

supply chains in the event of a future crisis.

***Support private sector growth.*** Africa's private sector can play a significant role in mitigating future crises by contributing their resources, personnel, and skills. In Nigeria, companies such as KPMG and MTN formed the Coalition Against COVID-19 (CACOVID) which provided financing for purchasing medical supplies and the creation of isolation centres. Governments must ensure that a conducive environment exists for businesses to grow and strengthen if they are to offer support during times of crisis. Achieving this requires cutting red tape, improving access to capital, attracting investment, and making it quicker and easier for individuals to establish businesses.

#### 4. Collaboration is Key

When COVID-19 first grabbed international headlines, there was a strong call for Africa to “act collectively, and fast”.<sup>24</sup> This was predicated on the fear that the continent's poor healthcare infrastructure would collapse under the strain of COVID-19, and that every attempt needed to be made to ensure there was adequate capacity.

While the continent has faced numerous challenges, particularly around testing capacity and the economic ramifications surrounding the pandemic, there have been encouraging signs of collaboration, all of which provide vital lessons.

There has been strong collaboration between governments, international organisations, and private donors. For example, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) worked with the South African Department of Health to establish a 60-bed COVID-19 treatment facility in the country's Western

Cape, while the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has provided assistance with local disease support and surveillance across the continent.

During the pandemic, the AfDB established the COVID-19 Response Facility to support member countries. The facility has ringfenced \$10 billion for governments and the private sector. The Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank (TDB) also contributed towards the continent's fight against COVID-19, donating \$500 million to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The Africa CDC, which serves as the public health agency of the AU, has been at the frontline of the continent's response to COVID-19, providing direction and support for the continent's 54 countries. The organisation was quick to produce the *Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19* while it also launched a joint procurement platform which has enabled governments to access PPE supplies.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred collaboration on the continent, more can be done to improve collaborative ties and ensure that future crises are confronted collectively and more effectively. Governments should therefore endeavour to:

#### ***Strengthen regional blocs and actors.***

Africa is home to eight regional economic communities as well as the AU and AfDB. As seen with the Africa CDC, these entities can provide key financial and operational support during a crisis. Having organisations such as the Africa CDC can be particularly beneficial for governments who lack financial resources or the capacity to execute large-scale projects. Governments should look to increase cooperation vis-à-vis their respective regional blocs as well as the AU by sharing resources, personnel, and advocating for increased institutionalism across the

continent. It is vital that these actors are not only well resourced but also legitimised by their member governments.

***Supplement internal shortcomings with domestic, regional and international support.*** A global crisis such as COVID-19 is too large for any country to handle on its own. This is especially true in Africa where there is typically a shortage of key skills and resources. Indeed, crises can be more efficiently mitigated and resolved if governments collaborate and work with their partners. Governments therefore need to ensure that they work with foreign governments, multinational organisations, and private donors when combating a crisis. Local NGOs can also assist with disseminating information and engaging with specific communities and demographics.

***Catalyse the implementation of integration frameworks and plans.*** Africa needs to overcome its policy inertia and get serious about continental frameworks for economic integration. The disruption to global supply chains caused by COVID-19 highlights the need for reliable trade networks throughout Africa as well as unfettered access to key supplies during times of crisis. Implementation of frameworks which enable this, such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), are imperative for reducing vulnerability during global disruptions. Using the recent crisis as impetus, governments must ensure that the new launch date for AfCFTA (January 2021) is upheld and further efforts are made to improve integration along trade and migration.

## 5. Leadership in Times of Crisis

The primary responsibility of any government is to serve its people, and this is especially true during a crisis. It is fitting

then, that the final lesson is concerned with leadership. Africa has seen great leaders confront challenging crises: from President Sirleaf's ability to rescue war-torn Liberia, to Prime Minister Ahmed's success in striking a peace deal between Ethiopia and neighbouring Eritrea.

During a crisis, exemplary leadership is required to steer a country through the hardship, that much is clear. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen few demonstrations of such leadership, instead highlighting that even during a crisis, unscrupulous behaviour continues to undermine the integrity and actions of governments across many corners of the continent.

Zimbabwe is one such example where the COVID-19 crisis has been met by an absence of leadership and coupled with a surge in corrupt activity among government officials. At a time when countries across the world are investing heavily in their healthcare sectors, Zimbabwe is doing the opposite. Doctors and nurses from across the country have reported working without adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), resulting in the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) having gone to court to compel the government to provide them with access to PPE while also equipping hospitals with the necessary resources to combat the pandemic.<sup>25</sup>

Under the guise of the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdown, corruption has surged in Zimbabwe. This follows reports of authorities in some areas of the country purposefully restricting the distribution of food aid to ZANU-PF supporters,<sup>26</sup> while President Mnangagwa's son, Collins Mnangagwa, has been implicated in a \$1 million PPE tender case.

Similar incidents have occurred elsewhere on the continent. In South

Africa, the government's procurement scheme for PPE has been hit by allegations of corruption. This comes as investigators have been probing \$636 million of the government's COVID-19 spending.<sup>27</sup> Several Kenyan government officials have also been accused of misusing millions of dollars which were intended for COVID-19 medical supplies.<sup>28</sup>

The poor leadership and corruption shown in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Kenya during the COVID-19 pandemic are an example of how governments ought not to act during a crisis. Greed and corruption are the antithesis of good governance, and at the height of a crisis, leadership such as that under President Sirleaf of Liberia and Prime Minister Ahmed of Ethiopia is what is required. When confronted with a crisis, governments must ensure that they:

***Look beyond party politics and prioritise the country.*** African leaders must act outside the parameters of the next election cycle and instead, focus on confronting the crisis head-on and supporting their country and its citizens. This will require making decisions that are perhaps not politically expedient, but which will serve the best interests of the people. Government should endeavour to work with all political actors, regardless of their affiliation, to maximise the efficacy of their response.

***Ensure government actions – such as spending and procurement – are transparent.*** In order to maximise the impact of government spending and resource allocation, it is imperative that transparency is prioritised. This will reduce the opportunities for corrupt activity and thereby increase the impact of government support. Doing so will require making public all financial records as they relate to crisis spending and procurement,

as well as outlining where government aid is to be allocated and how it has been utilised.

***Engage with the public on a regular basis to assuage fears and instil confidence.*** True leaders lead from the front. During a crisis, government officials need to engage with the public on a regular occurrence to instil confidence among the citizenry while also assuaging fears and concerns. These leaders need to demonstrate that they understand the nature of the crisis and have a plan of action. This can be achieved through radio interviews, regular public service announcements, or televised appearances. It is imperative that leaders outline their strategies so that they public are informed.

## Conclusion

When COVID-19 shook the world at the beginning of 2020, many believed it would have a catastrophic impact on the African continent. The impact can best be described as mixed: Africa has experienced a lower-than-expected death toll, but the economic ramifications of the pandemic have proven to be dire.

The COVID-19 pandemic ultimately serves as a wake-up call for Africa, its leaders, and institutions. Indeed, the pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated many of the continent's weaknesses: poor fiscal reserves, strained healthcare systems, and fragile supply chains are just some of the issues which have been brought to the fore as a result of the pandemic.

As climate change becomes more pressing, urbanisation more rapid, and population growth increasingly exponential across the African continent, the crisis of tomorrow draws nearer. It is therefore imperative that African leaders act proactively to best mitigate future

crises using the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis.

This includes greater financial and risk management preparation; understanding the crisis and addressing it within the correct context; ensuring that a more diverse and resilient economy is in place; collaborating with stakeholders from across the continent and abroad; and demonstrating true leadership by leading from the front.

COVID-19 has illustrated how quickly crises can arise and the devastation they can cause. The only way in which

Africa will become better prepared for the next crisis is with a proactive response. A proactive and prepared set of measures will therefore prove invaluable when responding to the next crisis, whatever it may be.

## Endnotes

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