

Impact of COVID-19 in Africa: A severe setback for development

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COVID was late to arrive in Africa, with initial infection and death rates lower than elsewhere in the world. Community transmission is however now accelerating in most countries, with lack of safe water as a major

contributing factor. The pandemic also threatens to set back Africa's development and attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with extreme poverty on the rise, according to new international research to which Kelly Alexander of Tilburg University contributed.

Kelly Alexander is a Ph.D. candidate and faculty on the Global Management of Social Issues program in the Department of Organization Studies. She is researching social enterprises in Sub-Saharan Africa, and COVID-19 obviously affects the subject of her studies as well. She was invited to work on a large study by the Institute for Security Studies, University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science, and the Denver University's Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures.

The international research group explored three possible scenarios on the impact of COVID-19 in Africa using economic growth forecasts, mortality rates and efforts to ameliorate impact through social grants. Kelly Alexander contributed to a parallel qualitative research project to design and present a set of contextualized scenarios which involved dialogs with over 100 economists, political analysts, public health experts and other development practitioners and experts from Africa and globally. These dialogs focused on a number of factors that compound the pandemic in Africa, leading to significant uncertainty around the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Severe setback

COVID-19 is set to undo several years of development progress towards attaining the SDGs in Africa, the researchers concluded, in all scenarios. In a best case scenario, GDP per capita will recover to 2019 levels in 2024. In the medium case, Africa will only return to 2019 levels in 2030. In the worst case, more people will have died from the impact of reduced health expenditure and hunger by 2030 than from COVID-19.

Recommendations

Beyond the emergency policies to fight the pandemic and mitigate its associated short-term economic impact, there is an obvious need for policies to build future resilience. To this end, the researchers recommend four strategic priorities:

1. The most urgent priority is effective responses to Africa's emerging [debt crisis](#) by providing debt relief;
2. The second priority is increased and more effective health spending. Governments must also ensure that their focus on COVID-19 does not result in an increase in co-morbidity, such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis related deaths.
3. Third, closely linked to healthcare, is the provision of safe water, improved sanitation and hygiene, and other basic infrastructure—something that African countries have generally underinvested in.
4. The final policy priority is the necessity of spurring Africa's economic reform to boost much more rapid and inclusive economic growth.

On a more positive note, says Alexander: If this crisis accelerates much needed reforms in Africa, those reforms will improve its development in the long term. But for now, it is up to the policy makers to make very important decisions.

More information: The report is available online:
issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ar24v2.pdf

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