

Lessons from Africa's Pandemics and Economic Leap After Covid-19

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Abstract

African countries often experience challenges in dealing with epidemics of global scale that occur periodically. The objective of this article is to highlight key lessons from Africa's pandemics and economic leap after COVID-19. The article draws from historic perspectives of how the continent has battled pandemics in the past, including HIV/AIDS, influenza, and Ebola, among others. Practical examples from specific country examples, including South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and Ghana have been highlighted in a bid to demonstrate the continent's struggles when it comes to dealing with pandemics. The article also wades into the economic, political, educational, and cultural conditions of Africa after facing COVID-19. In particular, the article reveals that COVID-19 has come at a time when Africa continues to lag behind in terms of lack of industrialization and stunted economic growth, factors that have compounded the general preparedness to tackle the pandemic. Fourteen countries in Africa still surround their financial autonomy to France, a fact that has contributed in undermining the collective economic growth and social development of the affected countries. Africa geopolitics will continue to have a lasting effect on the continent's capability to tackle COVID-19, particularly given that the eternal power struggle for a long reign, mismanagement, and poverty frustration will overpower any development action plan.

Keywords—COVID-19 economic, political, cultural and education Africa's pandemics

Introduction

History has taught us that society changes by contingencies. Unpredictable events dependent on fortuitous circumstances, whether economic, social, or political, leave their marks on society. Let's look at history in retrospect. It would be fair to say that diseases, the tense moments of hegemony in Europe, wars, and decolonization, and the black consciousness movement ultimately altered the course of history. The African continent is not a stranger to the world's dangerous pandemics. The Healthcare history of Africa, for instance, recorded deadly pandemics and epidemics such as Smallpox in South Africa in 1713, 1755, and 1765 (SAHO, n.d), Influenza in Ghana, Sierra Leone, and South Africa in 1918-19 (Killingray, 2003), ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa and Nigeria (Kharsany & Karim, 2016), and recurring Ebola outbreaks since 1976 when the first outbreak occurred in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC), Sudan, and West Africa (Cenciarelli, et al., 2015), before the COVID-19 pandemic.

factors translate the passive adherence to the Coronavirus policies put in place to mitigate the threats. The first cases of the COVID-19 detected were on travelers before it propagated in the population. Those who can't travel have no urgency to worry about the virus. Generally, people in Africa have low trust levels in their governments following years of endemic corruption, coercion and insufficient care for physical, economic, and social welfare for ordinary people, lack of transparency in public institutions creates attitudes in the people (Gyimah-Boadi & Logan, 2020).

The governments instituted curfews to encourage social distancing, border and travel restriction, school closure, and bans on large gatherings. In some countries such as Togo, the government offers moratory taxes, application fees, water, and electricity as incentives. The Togo government took charge of the COVID-19 detection test and admission fees for critical patients since there is no social protection for the informal workers. The government also requires the COVID-19 testing results in a travel document to get in the country and establishes 14 days of confinement and isolation with positive cases (B.A.L. Global, 2020). The strategies were different in the neighboring countries such as Ghana or Benin. Ghana observed three weeks of total lockdown in two crucial cities Accra and Kumasi. Benin opted not to lockdown the country and argued that the lockdown restriction would have a severe impact on the population and the economy. South Africa has the highest infection rate on the continent, with its wealth and leadership that West African countries may envy. The South African health authorities implemented 21 days of full lockdown. The overwhelming majority of the positive case is from the black community.

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Brief historical background of Attitudes of the people and politicians the African experience with epidemics and pandemics

The limited documented resources on epidemics and pandemics make the analysis a little complicated. However, oral documentations of the diseases that decimated the population in storytelling and songs give a glimpse of their magnitudes (Cheng & Zhan, 2019). HIV/AIDS and Ebola have more written records than any previous diseases the continent ever experienced. Healthcare is a complicated subject in Africa because it implicates culture, ethnicity, economics, and spirituality. However, the progress in new technologies and social media have eased information accessibility on the latest outbreaks. Ebola and Covid-19 have more awareness campaigns than HIV/Aids.

Information technology, and in particular social media, contributes to awareness but equally serve as platforms for conspiracy theories, fake news, and sensationalism (Benton & Dionne, 2015). These

COVID economic, political, educational, and cultural conditions

Before the COVID-19, most of the world economy was in a recession. The back and forth between the US and the European countries, the tense U.S.-China relationship revealed a lot about the global economy. The pre-COVID-19 economy of Africa was heavily based on trades and foreign aid. The president of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo, voiced his frustration about the foreign aid on the African continent when he was elected. According to Nana Akufo-Addo, the foreign aid had entrenched a culture of laziness as African leaders only waited for charity and generosity from European taxpayers (Asiedu, 2017). Nevertheless, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the foreign minister of Ghana walked back

the president's vision of refusing foreign aid and stated that Africa deserves more COVID help. The foreign aid finds a new ameliorated version Africa Action Plan before the COVID-19. The foreign partners said that this new starting plan would lead the continent to sustainability. Although the continent sits on strategic natural resources, Africa continues to lag behind industrialized countries. The forecast growth before the coronavirus was 5.6% a year, with an average potential growth of 6% between 2013 and 2023. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the lockdown will shrink the economy between \$27 to \$79 billion in 2020 (Isaac, 2020). The continent's pre-COVID-19 economies are based on trades, industry, agriculture, and human resources. In Sub-Saharan, the governments offer tax breaks, subsidies and weaker labor and environmental regulations, and net resources transfer to rich countries. Thus, the trade deficiency between the continent and the developed countries keeps widening. Africa exports almost all its raw minerals, Gold, crude Petroleum, oily seeds, pure woven cotton, etc. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank's roles in Africa redressing are interpreted differently on the continent. For example, while President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana considers foreign aid as a source of laziness for Africans (Asiedu, 2017), other countries in the continent such as Kenya view aid extend by foreign lenders as a source of capital to spur economic growth (Smith, 2019). The organizations condition the African qualification to the austerity programs to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), tourism promotion, privatization of the state-owned companies, and liberalization of the financial markets will hit hard the economy after COVID-19. It can be argued that the most of Africa has not been able to industrialize even after 60 years under IMF, given that majority of the countries in the continent are poor. It might be time to look for endogenous solutions. Researchers and "think tanks" prioritize domestic production and regional integration as solutions for the African continent development (O'reilly, 2020). These analysts are conscious of the number of intelligent millennia who finished school and have no job.

COVID-19 and African Continental development

Beyond any philosophical consideration, the African continent is not homogenous. There are approximately 1.33 billion people in Africa, and the continent is subdivided into seven different regions. However, almost every economic paradigm experimented are unable to yield the desirable outcomes. The continent ratified several protocols but the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) was presented like the one that will complete the integration. Although the continent is subdivided into fundamental building blocks for economic integration, the critics argue its achievement. The blocks are AMU/UMA (North), ECOWAS (West), EAC (East), SADC (South), COMESA (Southeast), ECCAS (Centre), and the CEN-SAD (North). These different blocks should contribute to the continent's economic growth. What do these organizations serve if they can't initiate the industrial revolution of the continent? The solution resides in embracing the inter-continental trade, free tariff agreement, and new redefinition of colonial secret deals.

For over 60 years, fourteen countries under the French rule and post-colonial relationships in West and Central Africa (Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Togo, Chad, and Congo-Brazzaville) surround their financial autonomy to France. CFA is the Financial Community of Africa. This currency was intentionally designed to undermine community economic growth and social development. For instance, the CFA zone countries need to deposit portions of their external earnings and assets at the French Treasury where their operations account is based. This means the wealth of the CFA zone countries may ideally not be fully helping to build their respective economies, but instead helping to fund France's economy (Taylor, 2019).

Lately, the currency is a center of many critics for several reasons. The exchange for the French treasury's guarantees is lower than the money the community places in the reserve. The 14 countries are absent in monetary policymaking. African countries that use CFA currency have in the recent times faced and continue to experience political upheavals particularly owing to economic challenges, with examples including Burkina Faso and Togo. Arguably, corruption, despotic regimes, impunity, and mal governance characterize the governments. The Coronavirus pandemic slows down the common currency (ECO) that the West African countries plan to replace the CFA.

At the Paris Accord Agreement, it was a question to assist those third world countries in collecting, documenting climate action for mitigation, adaptation, and support; domestic measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) frameworks (Rogelj et al., 2016). The continent will achieve its industrialization and intercontinental trading if the regional blocks are serious about their ratified agreements. The COVID-19 has not stopped the natural disasters, and pollution continues, sea levels rising, wildfires increases, shifting, and a lot to clean up after the pandemics.

African nations are unique in dealing with the virus

Should it be fair to say that African nations are unique in dealing with the virus? Some parts of the continent have already experienced fatal pandemics. In the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak, the partners deployed infrastructures, training and awareness programs, testing skills, and knowledge. They serve as a baseline for the current pandemic. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and Liberia served as case studies for the other part of the continent to put the program in place in response to the potential crisis (Jung, Shin & Yeo, 2018). At first sight, African nations' approach to the virus was scary because they lack adequate health infrastructures, poor health working and safety conditions, and lack of safety net. The strategies differ from one country to another, even though the Africa Task Force for Coronavirus (AFTCOR) works with existing supply chain systems to step up functioning regional lab referral networks to help countries (AU and Africa-CDC, 2020). They lack diagnostic capacity to respond in a timely manner to the need. Many governments embraced lockdown or confinement with few exceptions. The continent also emulates the different successful approaches in the countries that first experienced the outbreaks (Dandara, Kengne & Kuguyo, 2020). Some countries came with their local remedies. In Madagascar, President Andry Rajoelina got into a vivid discussion with the World Health Organization on a product developed by the Madagascar Institute of Applied Research (MIAR). COVID Organic is a substance made from herbal tea made from Artemisia and several local ingredients that the government believes cure the COVID. The World Health organization refused to endorse the COVID Organic and provoked a diplomatic confrontation between the organization and the republic of Madagascar. This skepticism on COVID organic rose from the Pan-African support of the African leaders who ordered the tea's product ordering batches. African countries make survival decisions to continue with the controversial hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin as the primary treatment of the COVID-19. The pandemic has a common denominator threat to freedom, social and economic justice, human dignity, and human rights as many people continue to fall ill and are secluded from others in a bid to control the spread of the virus.

Global hegemonic and Africa Geopolitics

This coronavirus altered the global hegemonic configuration (Layne, 2020). We observe two different tendencies. Some countries will focus on domestic affairs, whereas others will juggle international commitments and domestic challenges after the

pandemic. The way things go around the world with unfounded accusations will affect geopolitical dynamics in years to come. For instance, US President Donald Trump is on record accusing China of deliberately spreading COVID-19 to target the US. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel is no longer running for office. France's Emmanuel Macron is eligible for a second term, China's Xi Jinping, and Russia's Vladimir Putin will continue pulling world affairs in their directions as they can. On the African continent, the eternal power struggle for a long reign, mismanagement, and poverty frustration will overpower any development action plan. The social challenges and political conditions are not any sign of stability. That is the case of Mali, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and many others elections on the continent. Some countries will see their demographic shift skewed in the seniority curve, sharp inequality in minority populations worldwide, sweeping changes to immigration policies, and variable education policies, especially given that COVID-19 fatal cases are mostly the old people with compromised immune systems.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is a contingency that, instead of being a barrier despite the mortality rate that the contemporary world has never seen, should be a new benchmark of our civilization. However, suppose history teaches us that our times' progress is the derivative of difficult moments of our history. In that case, we will have to be daring in our decisions, and the projects of our offspring's society will serve as references.

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