



Impact of COVID-19 in Africa: A scenario analysis to 2030 (July 2020)

Setting the scene

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Setting the scene

The World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledged COVID-19 as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020. Africa experienced its first case on 14 February, in Egypt, and COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic on 12 March. Two months later the disease had spread to every country in Africa, mostly entering capital cities through international flights from Europe and spreading from there through community transmission.

To date, mortality rates in Africa are significantly lower than elsewhere, generally attributed to Africa's more youthful population. Community transmission is however now accelerating in most countries. The pandemic is spreading particularly rapidly in South Africa, which has the largest number of cases, although most deaths in Africa attributable to COVID-19 have occurred in Egypt. [1] While the veracity of testing and case data in Africa is questionable, the impact of the pandemic is uneven. Other highly affected countries include Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria and Ghana.

While it took 98 days for Africa to reach the first 100 000 cases, it took only 18 days for that number to double and the rate continues to accelerate. [2] For much of Africa, it seems likely that the larger infection and mortality impact of COVID-19 is still to come.

Early efforts to contain the spread through travel restrictions, lockdowns and market closures have played an important role in constraining rates of infection in many countries but have taken a heavy social and economic toll. Some countries, such as Tanzania, have taken limited measures against the virus and in April 2020 stopped updating public information relating to the pandemic.

The impact of the pandemic has been described by the UN as 'the greatest test that we have faced since the formation of the United Nations' [3], and by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as 'the worst economic fallout since the Great Depression'. [4]

The UN Development Programme expects the decline in the Human Development Index in 2020 to erase all progress made in human development worldwide over the past six years. [5] Globally, more than US\$8 trillion has been committed to fighting the associated health, economic and other effects — an amount several times larger than the combined GDP of Africa.

Chart 1:

The project was implemented by the African Futures & Innovation programme at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the Centre for Leadership and Dialogue at the Gordon Institute for Business Science (GIBS) in Johannesburg and the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures at the University of Denver, United States. Funding was provided by Humanity United and the Hanns Seidel Foundation.

Endnotes

1. Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
2. WHO, [Rolling updates on coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)
3. United Nations, [UN launches COVID-19 plan that could 'defeat the virus and build a better world'](#), *UN News*, 31 March 2020
4. International Monetary Fund (IMF), [Confronting the Crisis: Priorities for the Global Economy](#), speech by Kristalina Georgieva, IMF managing director, Washington, DC, 2020
5. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), [Human Development Reports, COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery](#), 2020, p.6

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About the authors

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director of the ISS. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the ISS. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020), *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), and *Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity* (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

About African Futures & Innovation

Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.