



# Current Path

## COVID-19

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## COVID-19

In late 2019, the SARS-CoV-2 virus spread to humans in China's Wuhan province. The subsequent COVID-19 pandemic brought the global economy to a shuddering halt.

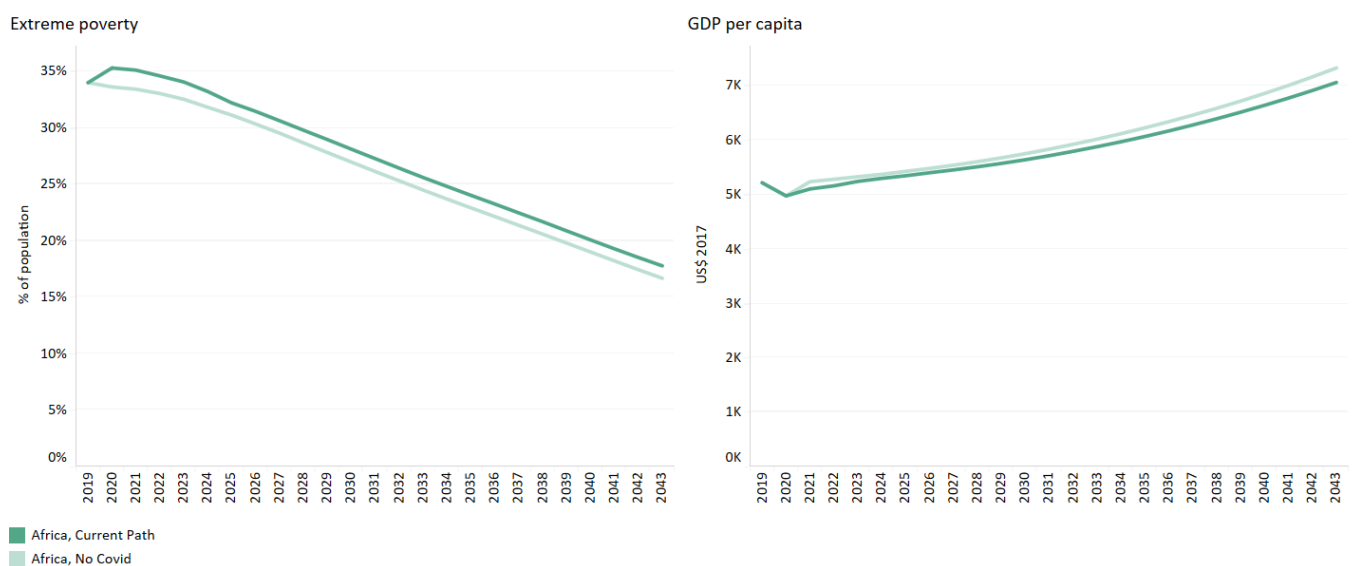
Initially, the fear was that mortality from COVID-19 would hit Africa harder than other regions due to higher poverty levels, lower-quality health services, and the higher prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other comorbidities. Eventually, the reverse transpired, generally attributed to the continent's youthful population. More than 80% of Africans who were infected with the virus were asymptomatic, meaning they showed no symptoms and could carry on with their normal activities, almost double the average for the rest of the world. However, Africa has not been spared the dire economic impacts associated with the virus, such as declining tourism and the knock-on efforts to contain the spread of the pandemic globally.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the IMF expected that Africa would register close to 3.3% average growth in 2020. Eventually, the health crisis caused a collapse of six percentage points in growth compared with the pre-COVID forecast, equivalent to a difference of US\$197 billion in the size of the African economy. With a population increasing at 2.7% annually, Africa's average GDP per capita fell by almost US\$300 in 2020 compared with a no-COVID forecast.

Although wealthier African countries have more resources to face the pandemic, they also tend to have a larger decrease in GDP. The South African economy shrunk by US\$42 billion in 2020 compared to a no-COVID scenario, followed by Nigeria with a US\$24 billion decline.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is that 21 million more Africans were likely to have been classified as extremely poor in 2020 than would have been the case in a no-COVID scenario. Government revenues in Africa were estimated to decline by US\$73 billion in 2020 and by US\$17 billion in 2021 compared with a no-COVID forecast. The effects will linger. By 2030, more Africans are likely to have succumbed to the secondary impact of the associated reductions in government revenues—reductions in health expenditure in particular—than from the direct effect of the virus.

Chart 12: Extreme poverty and GDP per capita in Africa with/without COVID, 2019–2043



The response by African governments to the threat of COVID-19 differed sharply between countries, with most adopting variations of lockdown measures and instituting harsh travel restrictions. Necessary spending on health interventions, social grants and general fiscal stimulus to drive recovery, together with reduced government revenues, have also

increased debt dependence and reduced debt sustainability, even in Africa's wealthier countries. African countries estimated (in 2020) that they would need annual support of US\$100 billion for the next three years plus the extension of a moratorium on debt repayments announced by the G20. Eventually the moratorium expired at the end of December 2021 having suspended only US\$12.9 billion in [debt-service](#) payments owed by 48 participating countries to their creditors. It has not been [extended](#).

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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.

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