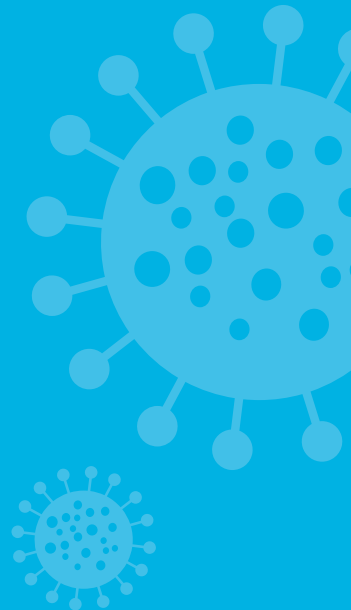


COVID-19 in African cities

Impacts, Responses and Policies Recommendations



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COVID-19 IN AFRICAN CITIES

Impacts, Responses and Policies

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Executive Summary

COVID-19, a global pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO), is crippling the global economy and upending people's lives thereby threatening sustainable development across all its dimensions. Africa is also facing the dire consequences of the crisis, necessitating timely responses, recovery and rebuilding policies and strategies. Globally, urban areas are the epicentres of the epidemic accounting for the vast majority of the confirmed COVID-19 cases. This report looks at the impacts, responses and policy pathways related to COVID-19 in the context of cities in Africa.

Africa is currently experiencing the most rapid urban growth in the world. The urban population increased more than 10 times in six decades, from 53 million to 588 million during the period from 1960 to 2020.¹ African cities are epidemiological foci of for COVID-19 like other urban areas globally. However, the quality and nature of Africa's urbanization exacerbates transmission rates of infectious diseases like COVID-19 and makes containment and response measures considerably more difficult.

The COVID-19 risk factors are acute in African cities in part due to the largely unplanned and poorly managed urbanization process resulting in widespread informal settlements and severe infrastructure and service deficits. In 2019, about 47% of Africa's

urban population lived in slums or informal settlements, which translates into about 257 million people across the whole of Africa. Only 55% and 47% of Africa's urban residents have access to basic sanitation services and hand washing facilities respectively. Furthermore, most urban residents rely on the informal sector that employs 71% of Africans, making them highly vulnerable to loss of income and unable to abide by restrictions and lockdown measures. African cities often have high population densities coupled with overcrowded public transport and marketplaces making social distancing almost impossible. These factors combined make Africa's cities hotbeds for COVID-19.

COVID-19 has registered adverse impacts in cities in multiple ways. With Africa having low ratios of health professionals and hospital beds and most of its stock of pharmaceuticals being imported, health systems are highly constrained in their response to COVID-19. Inhabitants of slums and informal settlements face heightened challenges in accessing healthcare services and products. From an economic perspective, urban based enterprises and sectors have undergone drastic reductions and closures especially SMEs which have a constrained ability to absorb shocks.. Widespread loss of employment income has been registered with informal sector workers being especially vulnerable.

Other challenges include elevated risks of eviction and homelessness, food insecurity and information inequalities especially among women. As first responders in tackling the urban impacts of COVID-19, local authorities are key actors in taking measures to tackle the crisis, yet many face capacity constraints including a loss of up to 60% of their revenues.

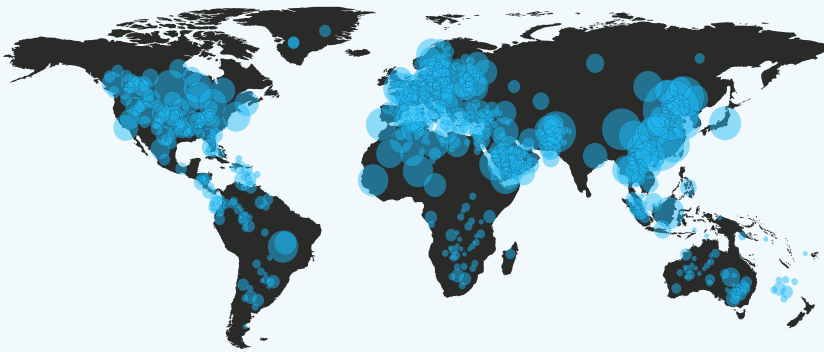
To promptly and adequately address the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic in Africa at the urban scale and through local governments, six key responses are recommended for short, medium and long term interventions led by national and local governments with the support of the African Union, United Nations System and Regional Economic Communities (RECs)¹. Apply local communication and community engagement strategies 2. Support SMEs and the informal economy 3. Deepen decentralized responses to COVID-19 through strengthening local government capacities 4. Target informal settlements through data driven contextualized measures 5. Establish mechanisms to promote rapid access to housing and prevent forced evictions 6. Integrate urban planning and management as key priorities for recovery and rebuilding strategies towards long-term resilience.



¹ World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, in <https://population.un.org/wup/>



Introduction

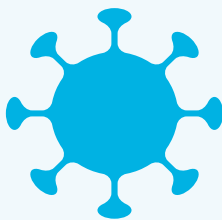


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The world is facing an unprecedented health crisis due to the spread of COVID-19. So far, the world has recorded over seven million confirmed cases and over 400,000 fatalities.² In just a few months, the pandemic has dramatically transformed the way people live, work, shop and socialize globally. Urban areas are the epicentres of the epidemic and over 95% of the confirmed COVID-19 cases are in urban areas.³



- 2 Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science Engineering (2020) COVID-19 Dashboard; <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>
- 3 UN-Habitat (2020) UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan; https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final_un-habitat_covid-19_response_plan.pdf

COVID-19 has produced adverse impacts at an unprecedented scale and the pandemic is likely to set off a historic global economic recession. So far, the measures taken worldwide to contain the spread of COVID-19 have affected the global value chains of manufacturing, transportation, retailing and consumption. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the anticipated recession of 'The Great Lockdown of 2020' is estimated at -3% compared to -0.1% during the global financial crisis of 2009.⁴ According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), an estimated 1.6 billion people employed in the informal economy - or nearly half the global workforce - could see their livelihoods destroyed due to the decline in working hours brought on by lockdowns and curfews aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19.



In Africa, where 163,699 positive cases were recorded as of 31 May 2020,⁵ the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) estimated considerable economic damage, social costs and compromised overall well-being. The average GDP growth in Africa in 2020 is expected to fall from 3.2% to 1.8% but may contract even further.

- 4 IMF (2020) World Economic Outlook (Chapter 1 The Great Economic Lockdown); <https://www.imf.org/~media/Files/Publications/WE0/2020/April/English/text.ashx?la=en>
- 5 Africa CDC Dashboard, <http://africacdc.org/covid-19/>

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Major economic sectors had already been adversely affected with the global fall in oil prices which accounts for 40% of region's exports. The informal sector which employs 71% of Africans could face dire consequences, with up to 25 million people possibly falling into extreme poverty. As elsewhere, urban areas in Africa are the main hotspots for the spread of COVID-19 and therefore require specific focus as the region defines and implements a continental response to the crisis.

Estimates show that about 47% of Africa's urban population live in slums or informal settlements in 2019, which translates into about 257 million urban residents living in slums or slum-like conditions across the whole of Africa (Figure 3). Such conditions contribute to accelerating COVID-19 transmission and present major challenges for response measures. The United Nations socio-economic framework for the immediate response to COVID-19 considers the urban informal sector and the self-employed as among the 'at risk' population groups experiencing a high degree of socio-economic marginalization. This is also the view of the Regional Risk Communication and Communication Engagement working group (RCCE).⁶

This inter-agency coordination platform on risk communication and community engagement stated that the population most at risk are those who depend heavily on the informal economy, occupy areas prone to shocks, have inadequate access to social services or political influence, have limited capacities and opportunities to cope and adapt with inadequate or no access to technologies. Migrants are also part of this group and, according to the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF),⁷ the flow of global remittances to low- and middle-income countries may fall by about one fifth in 2020.

So far, different measures have been taken by national, sub-national and local governments to contain the epidemic and to address its impacts on vulnerable groups and on national economies. Their implementation involved the development of technical partnerships, including the private sector and civil society. After close to two months of implementing COVID-19 responses, some countries among those that imposed a partial or full lockdown and restrictions on movements have announced measures to reopen their economies. UNECA⁸ is advocating for an effective COVID-19 lockdown exit strategy to mitigate the risks and protect vulnerable people.

6 RCCE (2020) COVID-19: How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement; https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/COVID-19_CommunityEngagement_130320.pdf

7 UNCDF (2020) COVID-19 changing the landscape for migrants and remittances; <https://www.uncdf.org/article/5606/covid-19-changing-the-landscape-for-migrants-and-remittances>

8 UNECA (2020) COVID-19: Lockdown exit strategies for Africa



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The pandemic is an opportunity for a new generation of multilateralism based on the subsidiarity principle and for effective decentralization to ensure that attention to the needs of citizens is incorporated in all governance mechanisms and levels. At the country level, UN Country Teams are working with donors to build partnerships with national and local governments, as well as communities and the private sector

economic response and recovery; and 3) 'Recovering better'.

African capital cities have proven to be the main entry points and epicentres of COVID-19 and they are now the hubs for the conception, implementation and monitoring of COVID-19 responses. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that African Governments need to revisit their urbanization perspectives and

This report reviews the key impacts of COVID-19 on African cities as well as the response measures taken so far to identify innovative practices, solutions and opportunities to inform and improve current and future recovery and rebuilding strategies. In doing so, it draws on the call by the United Nations for the scaling up of international solidarity and political commitment to ensure that people everywhere

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