

THROUGH THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

UNDP, AUC and Africa CDC
Respond to COVID-19 in Africa



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report details how UNDP has collaborated with the African Union Commission (AUC) and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) to help curb the spread of COVID-19, support African home-grown solutions and make way for socioeconomic recovery that can lead to a path towards attaining Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This work has been done in close concert with African people through civil-society organizations, youth champions and volunteer groups, as well as with governments, NGOs, UN agencies, businesses and funding partners.

At the start of 2020, Africa was riding nearly a decade of progress on prosperity, governance and peace. But when the first case of COVID-19 in Africa was reported on 14 February 2020 in Egypt, the predictions for the continent were dire. Thanks in part to a joint continental strategy by African Union member states, the exemplary societal resilience featured across sectors, and Africans' determination to fight the disease — to date¹, the continent has cautiously defied expectations and largely withstood the devastating health effects of the pandemic, as compared to other regions of the world. However, the socioeconomic crisis continues to hit Africa hard.

¹ This report covers the period from January 2020 to March 2021.

To mount the strongest response possible, UNDP partnered with the AUC and Africa CDC to help coordinate COVID-19 response and recovery efforts with member states, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs), alongside civil-society organizations. Together, these partners fought COVID-19 on all fronts, as the pandemic affected everything from gender equality to governance to peace. These joint efforts drew on the shared experiences of all participating institutions in the areas of health and sustainable development.

With global supply chains disrupted by lockdowns, no air and cargo transportation, and access to medical supplies limited by a surge in international demand, Africa searched for homegrown solutions. For the first time in modern history, Africa had limited recourse to external production sources. Putting a stop to the pandemic required the participation of Africans all over the continent.

UNDP, the AUC and Africa CDC worked together to inform Africans about how to address the pandemic and channelled people's energies in productive ways to do just that. For example, UNDP supported the deployment of digital tools such as **PanaBIOS**, a standardized testing platform that enables safe travel and trade across borders;² conducted interventions in cross-border and borderland regions such as the Mano River region where the pandemic was likelier to spread as people were in transit; addressed the complex nature of the crisis and helped ensure that democratic principles and the vital role of women were not compromised; and scaled up assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on governance, peace and security and socioeconomic status.

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which account for 90% of all businesses on the continent and 85.8% of all jobs in the informal sector, were especially hard hit by the pandemic. Their success throughout the pandemic and beyond is essential to the prosperity of all African countries. That is why UNDP and the AU have teamed up with **AfriLabs**, one of the continent's largest incubators for entrepreneurs, to support these forward-thinking innovators; that initiative has already given intensive training to 360 entrepreneurs from 120 MSMEs.

Even as we help generate solutions to this public health crisis, UNDP and the AUC are also looking beyond the pandemic. Through a compelling offer on driving equity, resilience and sustainability for COVID-19 vaccination, UNDP is well positioned to support countries with digital solutions for vaccine delivery, data for vaccine equity and greening vaccine delivery. We aim to work together to help restore Africa's momentum towards trade integration and maximizing the opportunities of trade-led growth, drawing on the continent's great human and natural resources and fulfilling its potential for growth, in part under the expansion of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)³ and the AU's "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want." With the AfCFTA Secretariat, UNDP published a groundbreaking publication that showcased opportunities in the AfCFTA and the views of women and youth engaged in export trade on how its promise can be maximized.

Working together, the AUC and UNDP will be with the people of Africa through the pandemic and beyond.



At the start of 2020, many would have bet their gold that sub-Saharan Africa was not the likely home for inventions. And yet here we are, witnessing an incredible display of possibility. Africa is managing the complexity of this devastating pandemic and looking for solutions to end it.”

Ahunna Eziakonwa
UN Assistant Secretary-General
UNDP Assistant Administrator and
Director of UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa.

² This Initiative has been adopted in Kenya and advancements are on course in Togo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Ghana and potentially Uganda. ECOWAS Heads of State adopted PanaBIOS as a trusted tool for testing and a safe reopening of Africa.

³ <https://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/library/the-futures-report-making-the-afcfta-work-for-women-and-youth.html>

A DECADE OF PROGRESS:

Africa Before COVID-19

Africa was riding nearly a decade of progress as 2019 made way for 2020. The continent had seen economic growth, stronger governance and a drop in violent conflict. As a result, 27 African countries had attained middle- or high-income status. The continent posted an 11.4% return on foreign direct investment, well above the global average of 7.1%.

The year 2020 ushered in the Decade of Action, a 10-year countdown to realize the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This period was expected to set a new pace for collaboration between governments, businesses, international agencies, communities and other key stakeholders to fulfil the global agenda for peace and prosperity.

However, as governments worldwide rolled out new efforts to achieve the SDGs, the global order was disrupted by the advent of the novel coronavirus and the ensuing pandemic.

The first case of COVID-19 in Africa was reported on 14 February 2020 in Egypt. Even then, at the very beginning, the pandemic seemed to portend a grim fate for Africa. After all, the disease was already ravaging countries with stronger health systems and policies.

DEFYING EXPECTATIONS:

Africa Faces the Pandemic

In March 2020, the African Union (AU) member states and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) released the “Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak.”⁴ The objectives outlined in the strategy were to coordinate efforts and promote evidence-based public-health practices.

In line with these objectives, AU member states adopted measures to contain the virus. As detailed in a joint report by AUC and UNDP on “The Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Governance, Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa,”⁵ such measures included government coordination, lockdowns, movement restrictions, social distancing, provision of personal protective equipment, additional pay for health care workers, and others.

Thanks in part to these measures, Africa has precariously defied expectations and largely withstood the health effects of the first wave of the pandemic. At the

time of writing (March 2021), though Africa accounts for nearly 17% of the world’s population, it accounts for only a small fraction of global COVID-19 cases and recorded fatalities, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).⁶

As of the beginning of 2021, the virus had infected over 2.5 million people in Africa and claimed over 60,000 lives. This is an enormous blow, but it’s far lighter than predicted.

If the health effects are fairly contained, the socioeconomic impacts are potentially devastating. One report produced with review support from UNDP⁷ said that government measures to contain the virus and stimulate economic activity in 10 sub-Saharan countries might lead to a reduction in GDP of up to 10.6% and 10 million more people falling into extreme poverty. The pandemic further risks pushing a number of people living in extreme poverty to over 1 billion by 2030.⁸

⁴ <https://africacdc.org/download/africa-joint-continental-strategy-for-covid-19-outbreak/>.

⁵ https://www.africa.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/COVID-19-CO-Response/UNDP-AU-Horn-Africa-RegionalBrief_final.pdf; https://www.africa.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/COVID-19-CO-Response/UNDP-AU-Horn-Africa-RegionalBrief_final.pdf.

⁶ <https://covid19.who.int/>.

⁷ Pages 8-9, “Unraveling the immediate and long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on socio economic development in sub-Saharan Africa,” by Willem Verhagen, et al. and produced with the support of the Institute for Security Studies, the Gordon Institute of Business Science at the University of Pretoria, and the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures at the Jeff Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver.

⁸ UNDP, Global SDG integration, <https://sdgintegration.undp.org/accelerating-development-progressduring-covid-19>.

A COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE:

UNDP, AUC and Africa CDC Team Up

UNDP and Africa CDC also partnered on other vital work. Together, we identified the need to ensure the continued supply of critical drugs needed to manage other infections such as HIV, TB and malaria.⁹ UNDP and Africa CDC identified six areas of collaboration to ensure a holistic approach to this complex crisis, reflected in UNDP's Regional Response:

1. Joint coordination and operations support
2. Impact assessments of COVID-19
 - a. The Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Governance, Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa.¹⁰
 - b. The Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Governance, Peace and Security in the Sahel.¹¹
 - c. Unraveling the immediate and long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on socio economic development in sub-Saharan Africa
3. Knowledge-sharing and online platforms
4. Public communications campaigns
5. Preparedness and response in cross-border areas
6. Prevention of sexual and gender-based violence

Through partnerships with the AUC, governments and organizations, we were able to draw on past collaborations in managing infectious diseases such as Ebola. The resilience, home-grown solutions and innovations by young Africans further reinforced our work in responding to COVID-19.

⁹ This work supported part of UNDP's Global Fund GFATMA work.

¹⁰ <https://au.int/en/documents/20200727/impact-covid-19-outbreak-governance-peace-and-security-horn-africa>

¹¹ <https://au.int/en/documents/20210122/impact-covid-19-outbreak-governance-peace-and-security-sahel>



Better Together: The Africa Joint Continental Strategy

From the onset, African governments recognized the multi-dimensional threats posed by COVID-19, the implications for health, livelihoods and national economies, as well as the possible reversal of development progress made in the past 30 years.

The AUC's Africa Joint Continental Strategy outlines roles, priority areas and coordination among entities throughout Africa. Such entities include the AU's eight RECs and RMs, as well as Africa CDC's five Regional Collaborative Centres (RCCs).

These entities responded promptly to the pandemic. For example, some of the early actions of the RECs included the following: The Secretariat of the East African Community (EAC) called on member states to develop national economic recovery plans and strengthen food production systems to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable populations. Heads of State of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) committed to strengthening cooperation on COVID-19 and health matters more generally, as well as to allocating at least 15 percent of their annual budgets to strengthening their health care systems. The South African Development Community (SADC) promptly undertook ten regional coordinated actions such as containing the pandemic and mitigating its socioeconomic impact, pooling the procurement of pharmaceutical and medical supplies, and others. Since these pledges were made, the RECs have continued to take strong action.

Together, these entities have worked with governments and coordinated their responses to COVID-19, including on such matters as surveillance, testing and tracking and cross-border trade and transport.

A COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE:

Fighting COVID-19 on All Fronts

COVID-19 has had an impact not only on all countries, but in all areas of life. The pandemic calls for a comprehensive approach to address its many facets.

UNDP has worked with partners on fighting COVID-19 on all fronts, such as by: supporting the AUC in studying the impact of COVID-19 on governance, peace and security; backing country offices and RECs in the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence during the pandemic; supporting the procurement of personal protective equipment for countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); bolstering health systems; and building the capacity of target groups such as health workers, faith-based organizations, civil-society organizations, youth and women's groups, and leading health institutions.

Support from UNDP has been aligned with its corporate three-pronged approach to:

- **Prepare:** Strengthen health systems, procure much-needed medical supplies, and leverage digital technologies to share knowledge.
- **Respond:** Slow the spread of the virus and provide social protections for vulnerable groups.
- **Recover:**¹² Assess the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 and take measures to minimize its long-term impact.

This approach in turn serves UNDP's broader commitment to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, strengthen effective and inclusive governance, and build sustainable health systems.

Given that supporting the AU's RECs and RMs is a priority, UNDP also partnered with the **West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** to launch a project titled "Building an Inclusive Post COVID-19 Recovery, Crises Transitions and Governance Reforms in the Sahel."¹³ This project aims to empower women as critical stakeholders in political transitions, governance, peace, security and development.

By responding in an integrated fashion to COVID-19, the AUC, Africa CDC, and UNDP are helping Africa not only respond to the pandemic but continue to build on its previous momentum from a position of strength.

¹² UNDP developed the recovery response Beyond Recovery, Towards 2030, however for the purpose of the project report the focus is on the three-pronged approach

¹³ <https://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/wanep--ecowas-and-undp-launch-governance-initiative-to-accelerat.html>

9 webinars hosted

975 total registrations 433 cumulative attendance



18 Expert Panelists



51 African countries participation

Better Together: The Africa Joint Continental Strategy

In partnership with Emory University, UNDP and Africa CDC launched a series of webinars on risk communication to improve the pandemic response. A total of nine webinars targeting journalists, faith-based organizations and youth attracted nearly 1,000 participants from 51 African countries.

The webinars featured experts recruited by Emory who led conversations on the use of data, evidence-based reporting, countering misinformation, and how young people can prevent the spread of COVID-19. Conversations also touched on spiritual counselling, interfaith communication and re-thinking faith journalism in the era of COVID-19. Critically, the webinars addressed gender issues in the pandemic response.

Lessons from all webinars were shared through all major social media channels. Together, the webinars and an online Knowledge Hub strengthened the fight against COVID-19.

FOR AFRICA, BY AFRICA:

Africa's Homegrown Solutions

With global supply chains disrupted by lockdowns and access to medical supplies limited by a surge in international demand, Africa looked for homegrown solutions. Big companies retooled their factories to make personal protective equipment. Small businesses and self-employed persons produced faceguards, cloth masks and other supplies. The AUC launched the **Africa Medical Supplies Platform**, an innovation which enabled all countries on the continent to procure much-needed medical and health supplies faster and at more competitive prices.

Putting a stop to the pandemic required the participation of Africans all over the continent. This meant they had to be informed about what COVID-19 was, how it spread, and how to prevent it. They also had to have access to the hygiene and protective supplies necessary to put that knowledge into action.

UNDP and Africa CDC worked with partners across the continent to achieve just that. Perhaps nowhere is this teamwork more evident than in our collaboration shoring up the response in cross-border areas.

COVID-19 crosses national borders, so the partnership had to as well. Africa's borderlands tend to have weak healthcare systems, acute shortages of clean water and basic supplies and unpredictable supply chains.

UNDP and the AUC partnered with community leaders and stakeholders to increase public awareness in border areas, especially in the Lake Chad Basin, the Mano River countries and the Horn of Africa.

A series of web-based dialogues sponsored by UNDP brings African voices to the global stage to influence approaches to COVID-19 recovery and drive progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The series, called "Hekima," has featured such leading lights as Nigerian playwright and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka and former President of the Republic of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. These dialogues mirror UNDP's experience in the region showing that robust engagement with communities is essential in the ongoing effort to combat COVID-19.



23 000
materials including
hygienic supplies,
PPEs, sanitisers, hand
washing buckets



Going to the Grassroots in Mano River Countries

The response in the Mano River countries serves as an example. Even before the pandemic, countries in the Mano River Union — Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire — contended with poor governance and an Ebola outbreak. COVID-19 only increased the risk of tensions between communities and dealt a blow to the region's economies. The impact was especially hard on female-headed households. Precautionary measures adopted by national authorities restricted the movement of a large percentage of the population.

In response, UNDP country offices and the Mano River Union office in Liberia delivered supplies to border counties, including thermometers, personal protective equipment, hand-washing buckets, hand sanitizer, face shields, face masks, alcohol, gloves, Clorox, educational materials and megaphones, some of which were procured locally. These supplies helped reduce the transmission of the disease across borders and built community engagement and awareness.

Volunteers were critical in educating the public about how to prevent COVID-19 in 20 border communities between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. These grassroots efforts helped ensure the message reached remote areas along the borders and also captured any early warning signs of tension.

AFRICA INNOVATES:

Entrepreneurs and Innovation Across the Continent

Throughout the course of the pandemic, Africa has seen an increase in innovative solutions, including virus-testing robots, contact-tracing apps, non-invasive testing kits, foot-operated hand-washing stations, oxygen machines, drone medicine-delivery service, genome sequencing, AI-powered healthcare chatbots and much more. These are among the 50 life-changing innovations from across the continent — and by inventors as young as age 9 — that were spotlighted by UNDP in its inaugural edition of Africa Innovates Magazine.¹⁴

Many of these and other innovations were made by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). The economic impact of the pandemic has been especially hard on such enterprises, many of which face potential closure or bankruptcy. As MSMEs account for 90% of all businesses on the continent and 85.8% of all jobs in the informal sector, closures could lead to massive job losses and drops in consumer spending.

“Throughout Africa, people are looking inward for the innovations that will move the continent forward. We’re looking ahead, to anticipate the needs of the next generations and envision a better future. And we’re looking to each other, to build the communities, the countries and the continent that we all know are possible.”

Dr. Ahmed Ogwel Ouma
Deputy Director, Africa CDC



¹⁴ https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2020/UNDP_Africa_releases_online_magazine_highlighting_50_young_Africans_innovating_against_COVID19.html

Supporting Innovation Through AfriLabs

The importance of MSMEs is what led UNDP and the AUC to partner with AfriLabs, one of the continent’s largest incubators for entrepreneurs. With a network of 225 innovation centres and organizations across 47 countries, AfriLabs has been helping businesses survive and even thrive during the pandemic.

An AfriLabs initiative called Rollo Africa is recruiting entrepreneurs to create jobs and develop innovative solutions to African problems. The recruitment campaign attracted thousands to the organization’s website and engaged half a million people through email and social media. 1,200 people applied from five countries: Cameroon, Egypt, Senegal, Sudan and Zimbabwe, and demand is high to expand the programme to other countries across Africa.

To date, the initiative has given intensive boot-camp training to 360 entrepreneurs from 120 small businesses, and provided them with a total of more than 1,500 hours in a high-tech business simulator, boosting their decision-making skills under various market conditions.

A unique aspect of the initiative is that it targets MSMEs and the informal sector — which is largely ignored in such efforts — including in the African diaspora. The initiative also collected data on MSMEs and the impact of COVID-19 on their operations, and will use the findings to create policy recommendations for the African Union Commission to maximize the economic benefits of the sector.



LOOKING PAST THE PANDEMIC:

Restoring Africa's Momentum
after COVID-19

Africa's economic advances over the past decade — not to mention the health and lives of millions of people — are at risk because of the pandemic. UNDP, the AUC and Africa CDC remain committed to putting a stop to COVID-19.

Looking forward the next phase of UNDP's COVID-19 crisis response is designed to help decision-makers look beyond recovery, towards 2030, making choices and managing complexity and uncertainty. As an immediate response to support recovery efforts driving equity, resilience, and sustainability for COVID-19 vaccination remains a critical priority. UNDP intends to support countries by offering digital solutions for vaccine delivery, provide data for vaccine equity and support greening of COVID-19 vaccine waste management.

Even as we generate solutions to this public health crisis, UNDP and the AUC are also looking past the pandemic to help restore Africa's growth momentum.

The continent has great resources.

These resources include people, land, renewable energy sources, minerals and life under water. The African workforce is projected to grow at an annual rate of 20 million people in the lead-up to 2030. Africa accounts for 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land and 30% of its mineral wealth, making it a source of jobs, food and unprecedented national and

generational wealth. Its marine resources mean it has an untapped blue economy.

The continent has great potential for growth. The expansion of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will connect 1.2 billion people across the continent. The agreement is expected to boost intra-African trade by 25%, raise household incomes, and empower the continent's young population, generating over \$6.7 trillion in consumer and business spending by 2040.

UNDP and the African Union Commission are helping put those resources to use to fulfil that potential.

The AUC has brought together all countries on the continent to achieve "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" with a 10-year plan to drive progress on everything from peace to prosperity to governance. It has also developed an ambitious digital transformation strategy which can drive innovative, inclusive and sustainable growth. For its part, UNDP has pledged its support through a Renewed Strategic Offer in Africa, drawing on decades of experience to create better policy, leadership, renewable energy and greater public engagement by women and youth. The AUC and UNDP coordinate on all aspects of these plans, taking a partnership approach and aligning our work to help Africa recover and thrive.

15 UNDP in Ghana and Zimbabwe assessed country readiness to manage waste and provided options for further enhancing the legal, regulatory, policy, institutional frameworks, and implementation to recover greener and to do no harm to people and the planet.



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