

Priorities for a fair recovery from COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Key messages



African nations have fared better than the rest of the world in terms of the devastating health-related impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, containment measures halted economic activities that resulted in major setbacks to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



To ensure a fair recovery from the pandemic, governments in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) should focus on the following priorities: building a strong and resilient healthcare system; helping small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to revive growth; diversifying economic activities in export-oriented sectors; promoting digitalisation in education, governance and economic activities; and strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation.



Recovery measures should include the creation of safeguards for SMEs from global calamities through capacity building for entrepreneurship, establishment of capital recovery programmes that forge strong links with financial services, and increasing formalisation of informal sector businesses.



SSA should consider diversification of export commodities, by exploring alternative sectors such as agriculture, solid mineral, manufacturing, and services. This will require capacity building initiatives for vulnerable groups so that they can prepare export-quality products and lower dependence on oil exports while incentivising the fisheries sector to grow.



While progress has been lost, the pandemic has provided new opportunities to get back on track towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. By leveraging the benefits of a teeming youth population, coupled with the low pandemic fatality rates, SSA can chart a path towards self-sufficiency by prioritising the development of a more resilient economy, indigenous manufacturing capabilities, and strengthening healthcare systems to address future shocks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the world and shaken it. At the time of writing this paper, the World Health Organization's COVID-19 dashboard reports 173,609,772 confirmed cases of COVID-19 including 3,742,653 deaths. In Africa, more than 3,580,822 COVID-19 cases and 88,585 deaths have been recorded (WHO, 2021a)¹.

With less than 4% of cases recorded on the African continent, the health-related impacts of the pandemic are much lower in Africa as compared to the rest of the world. African nations also appear to be more resilient to COVID-19 as compared to past pandemics caused by diseases like Ebola, yellow fever and malaria (Niang & Taylor, 2020; Mthembu, 2020). Since the onset of the pandemic, the region has increasingly cooperated with the WHO and other country partners to enforce standard operating procedures (SOPs) and other measures to effectively contain the spread of the virus. These measures include social distancing and mobility restrictions (both within and across borders), lockdowns, and curfews (WHO, 2021b).

However, despite the low fatality rates from the virus, these containment measures have led the region to suffer from other unprecedented socio-economic impacts to the point of compromising the progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2020). To address the consequences of the preventive measures put in place, countries have now introduced emergency fiscal (including fiscal stimulus packages) and monetary policies (including interest rate cuts, reserve requirement ratio cut, and direct liquidity provision) to stabilise the financial system and stimulate economic recovery (Ekeruche, 2021).

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The pandemic struck almost two years ago, and the world is now much more concerned with the post-COVID-19 recovery phase. Considering the steps taken by the governments in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) thus far, this study argues that equity and inclusion must inform further policy actions to ensure a fair recovery from the pandemic. Following a review of the literature on the regional impacts of the pandemic on equity and inclusion, and an examination of current policy responses, this study proposes a set of priorities and policy recommendations to promote a fair recovery from the pandemic in SSA.

¹ Accurate as of June 9, 2021

■ Approach

We understand priorities as the most important considerations and actions that the region must include in its recovery agenda, moving forward. Promoting inclusion means creating a level playing field for all regardless of barriers of any kind, with the implication of addressing the entire spectrum of needs of all, including vulnerable, marginalised and excluded persons (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016). The meaning of equity entails fairness and impartiality, that is, an ideal state in which the pandemic does not exacerbate existing inequalities, and where individuals have the same chance of getting access to opportunities, network, resources, and support in the recovery process in order to fulfil their needs and thrive (Daisy, 2019).

This study draws on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data involves information on the priorities from a recently organised regional consultation meeting and expert opinion survey of the Southern Voice members in SSA. The two activities were important for the collection process of primary data on the region's priorities. The virtual expert meeting was hosted by STIPRO in collaboration with the Southern Voice; participants identified the priorities for a fair recovery from COVID-19 and developed key characteristics of fair recovery in order to inform recovery plans by national and multinational actors at the regional and global levels. The expert group meeting was informed by the 2021 Southern Voice survey that collected feedback from Southern Voice experts in SSA on the priorities for regional recovery. The survey was conducted between April and May 2021, and included a sample size of 18 participants from SSA think tanks and members of the Southern Voice network.

The secondary data includes a synthesis of materials from the Southern Voice Digital Knowledge Hub, which is a collection of empirical studies on the impacts of COVID-19 on different dimensions such as social, economic, environmental, health, and governance issues. Other online materials include the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) policy tracker that provides a detailed analysis of fiscal, monetary, and financial policy responses to the pandemic around the world.

■ Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on SSA

SSA, a region that currently accounts for 1.1 billion inhabitants, is experiencing the deterioration of its impressive trend in socio-economic growth amassed in recent years. Over the last 20 years, the gross domestic product (GDP) has more than doubled in 28 of Africa's 44 countries. Of the ten fastest-growing economies in the world, five

countries were from Africa, prior to the onset of the pandemic (Mthembu, 2020). SSA also experienced improvements in poverty levels; more than 60% of the population lived in poverty in the 1990s, but this dropped to around 40% in 2015, with countries such as Chad, Tanzania, and The Gambia seeing their poverty rates decline by more than 3% per year (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2020). In addition, the World Development Indicators database of the World Bank shows that life expectancy has improved, and the rates of infant mortality at birth and maternal mortality have decreased.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent preventive measures, such as the restrictions on the mobility of people and goods, have led to the reversal of progress made in the past on social and economic development. The negative impacts have fallen disproportionately on the most vulnerable segments of the population (IMF, 2020).

Economy

The pandemic has resulted in a drastic drop in GDP growth, well into negative rates, and regional exports and imports have declined by 35% (African Union [AU], 2020). In addition, several studies have revealed that around 25 million people lost their jobs due to the pandemic (AU, 2020; Salih, 2020; Adeniran & Osakwe, 2020). For example, in South Africa, employment fell by 14% in the second quarter of 2020 (IMF, 2020). Informal workers were affected the most as they work in some of the hardest-hit sectors, such as wholesale and retail, food and hospitality, tourism, and transport. Moreover, according to the World Bank, women are often overrepresented in these sectors, making them one of the most affected demographics of the pandemic-induced economic crisis.

Education

The pandemic has completely disrupted the education sector, forcing students to lose almost two years of education, which has resulted in an increase in school dropouts and abuse of children's rights, as evident from the growing number of child marriages for girls and cases of genital mutilation (Salih, 2020). Moreover, where efforts to resume classes were offered, through digital education delivery systems, geographical positions and gaps along income lines widened the education divide among the population. The rural population of Kenya, for example, was affected more due to the lack of electricity and the inability of poor households to afford the electronic devices required for remote learning (Salih, 2020). UNESCO (2020) emphasises that over 330 million learners of all levels, across Africa, were affected due to connection problems, unreliable power supply, poor internet connection and financial costs. Bisong et al. (2020) add that two-thirds of the African population have no access

to 4G internet due to poor infrastructure and affordability constraints. In such education and learning situations, a long-term prognosis reflects an uncertain future for children and youth when they join the labour market.

Healthcare

Access to healthcare facilities and services has decreased following the fear of infection, and due to the lack of available services as a consequence of the diversion of resources to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Resources dedicated to tackling the pandemic have come at the expense of treating other diseases. Several studies reveal that the patients with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria were mostly affected by the decline in their care—a situation that led to greater morbidity and mortality (Zawawi et al., 2020; United Nations [UN], 2020; AU, 2020). The pandemic has struck at a time when Africa still lacks adequate sanitary conditions, with the vulnerable population affected the most. Despite progress made in this sector, the Africa Health Strategy for 2016-2030 has emphasised the need for efforts to increase prevention, improve primary care and strengthen curative sub-sectors, in addition to improving secondary healthcare systems (AU, 2015).

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Inequality

The pandemic has worsened poverty indices and increased social tensions. The World Bank, cited by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA] (2020), estimates that about 26 million people were pushed into poverty in SSA alone, which is an increase of 2%. Along with this, there has been widening inequality between urban and rural areas, the rich and poor, and between men and women (Niang & Taylor, 2020). This situation has heightened food insecurity, as people are unable to meet basic needs such as food (Kavuma, 2020; Moseley, 2020; Salih, 2020). The situation is aggravated by the fact that Africa is a net importer of agricultural and food products, which currently account for an annual bill of USD 35 billion. This is projected to rise to USD 110 billion by 2025 (Shaban, 2017).

Environment

The pandemic's impacts on the environment include an excess footprint of plastic waste (masks, gloves, aprons and bottles of sanitisers). Benson et al. (2021) estimate that 411 million discarded face masks per capita

per day is being generated. Duguma et al. (2021) report threats to wild animals, as pandemic-induced unemployment and mobility bans to markets and other sources of income have triggered a rise in bushmeat hunting in some reserves.

Peace and security

COVID-19 has further impacted politics (and governance) in the form of civil conflicts and insecurity as a result of hardship (UN, 2020). Such social and economic impacts associated with the pandemic have triggered conflicts and increased the vulnerability of certain communities, including internally displaced persons, refugees, migrants and marginalised groups (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020).

■ Governments' responses to the pandemic's negative impacts

The magnitude of the pandemic's impact on people's lives and livelihoods has pushed African countries to adopt policy responses to bolster social protection efforts and boost economic activities. IMF's Policy Response Tracker reports that 89% of African countries have deployed fiscal stimuli for vulnerable populations and 92% have provided liquidity to affected businesses and sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and aviation (IMF, 2020).

Socially, SSA governments have introduced price ceilings on essential items such as food (IMF, 2020; World Food Organization [FAO], 2020). The introduction of price ceilings helped counter over-pricing, thereby recognising the significant impact of commodity price increases, even on a small scale, on poor households and in local markets (Bassier et al., 2020). Though important, price ceiling measures appear temporary since price-setting relies on the price of input materials in the value chain. In South Africa, for example, the price of input materials affected this measure to the point of threatening production (Bassier et al., 2020). Other social assistance measures across the region involved the provision of food assistance, financially or in-kind, to vulnerable households (IMF, 2020; FAO, 2020).

■ **Africa's demonstrated resilience to COVID-19, so far, ensures the immediate availability of human resources in enterprises and markets to stimulate rapid business recovery.** ■

Economically, policy responses involved tax rate reductions, acceleration of payments to facilitate firms' liquidity, and in some places, the governments arranged to postpone tax and social security collection from businesses in order to give them time for recovery. Special solidarity

funds and resource mobilisation for private sector donations were also introduced (IMF, 2020). The governments' stimulus packages have contributed to maintaining macroeconomic stability. They also helped prevent businesses from collapsing and increased the disposable income for the elderly, orphans and vulnerable groups, thereby boosting domestic demand and consumption (Salih, 2020).

However, these support measures have not been significant enough to reach a vast number of poor households in need. For example, the fiscal packages in the region have averaged only 3% of GDP that included three quarters for health needs, and the remainder for crisis-related transfer and spending (IMF, 2020). In comparative terms, the IMF reports that the fiscal package that SSA puts in place for the healthcare sector has markedly been less than the amount spent in other regions such as emerging economies (about 5%) and advanced economies (about 8%).

The region faced limitations in resource mobilisation, which explains its inability to cover the entire population that is in need of support. Various reports by the IMF's World Economic Outlook database show a decrease in government revenues, from 20% of GDP during pre-pandemic times to 18% of GDP post-pandemic. This was also the time when the region struggled with an increase in public debt, which was projected to be 66% of GDP, increasing from 56% of GDP during the pre-pandemic period (IMF, 2020). Given this situation, the limited support provided by governments has generally benefited only a small proportion of the population that pays taxes. The Southern Voice survey results concur with this observation, where more than half of the participants (strongly) disagreed with the statement that the governments' responses, so far, are emphasising the needs of the vulnerable.

Another concern is the lack of inclusivity in the governments' stimulus packages, especially concerning the informal sector's access to these provisions. The informal sector not only engages a majority of the population, but also involves a considerable number of vulnerable groups. Ekeruche (2021) reports that the urban poor and informal sectors were the most excluded from the coverage of cash transfer programmes, and implementation of the fiscal policies mostly applied to the formal sector. Discussions during the expert group meeting highlighted that SSA economies often concentrate on large corporations compared to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), particularly informal businesses, which are important to and constitute a significant portion of SSA economies. For instance, IMF (2020) estimates that the informal sector employs up to two-thirds of the workforce, which, together with a large proportion of the most vulnerable households, are beyond the reach of local safety nets. This highlights the need for rethinking inclusivity in policy responses.

■ **Priorities to promote a fair recovery from the pandemic**

Based on the identified limitations of current government responses and the analysis of data from different sources such as consultations with experts, survey results and literature review, a fair recovery from the pandemic requires the promotion of inclusive and equitable policies under particular priority sectors, as previously indicated in this study. These recommendations are presented below.

Resilient healthcare systems

The first priority area should involve strengthening of the healthcare system to address shocks caused by COVID-19. Although Africa reported fewer cases of COVID-19 than other continents, it is unclear what the future holds. For instance, the new and emerging variants of COVID-19 have put the world in an uncertain situation, not knowing when exactly the pandemic will end. Thus, there is a need to take all necessary precautions to safeguard people's health.

SSA should focus more on prevention rather than treatment. Immunisation helps build resilience to new health shocks, thereby helping the government to maintain its institutional capacity to treat existing diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. Governments should prioritise significant investments in preventive measures such as vaccines to prevent diseases, hospitalisation and deaths amongst the vulnerable. Further efforts should be geared towards building regional capacities in the production and/or procurement of vaccines as well as oxygen cylinders to control the considerable number of patients in need of oxygen.

Inward-looking economic recovery

When considering economic sustainability and equity, the region should look inwards to support domestic growth. SMEs have shown a lot of potential for social and economic development by easily engaging women, low-income households and other marginalised groups. SMEs encompass trade, hospitality, tourism and manufacturing, and account for 80% of total employment in the African region (AU, 2020) with a ratio of 70:30 between female and male employees (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2001). Small-scale businesses should therefore be prioritised as they can play a key role in fostering development due to their potential for economic growth and poverty alleviation (Mutambala, 2011).

Various studies have reported a high closure rate (30 - 45%) of small scale businesses in SSA and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions, as a result of the pandemic (Facebook, OECD, & World Bank,

2020). Both growth and employment have been affected due to the economic restrictions put in place to combat the pandemic. Women and informal workers have been affected the most by these closures. Further, the pandemic has severely affected the region's tourism sector, particularly due to its large dependency on international tourists, who have decreased by 98% between April and June 2020 (Page, 2021).

In light of this, the recovery measures should ensure that policies are put in place to mitigate economic shocks to SMEs during global calamities. Economic recovery measures can include capacity building for entrepreneurship, including psychological therapy to restore the entrepreneur's business mindset, since many have faced a lot of disruption and loss. This kind of support should go hand-in-hand with the establishment of capital recovery programmes that forge strong links with financial services. Since many SMEs are part of the informal sector, governments need to ensure extension of the formalisation process so that a larger proportion of these businesses, in both rural and urban areas, can benefit from these recovery measures.

An 'inward looking' approach must also be extended towards regional tourism. Tourism in Africa accounts for 9% of the GDP and employs around 24 million people (Page, 2021), but it is mainly driven by visitors from outside the continent. It also has a potential multiplier effect since it is linked to sectors like hospitality, entertainment, and transportation. Promoting the localisation of regional tourism would help the sector to grow and become more resilient.

Economic diversification

Next, SSA needs to promote exports. The pandemic has disrupted the region's value chains and transport systems linked to them, in particular. The countries of the Global South that depend significantly on exports have been affected the most. Both closure of borders and decline in prices have severely affected their economies (Onyekwena & Ekeruche, 2020).

For the export-oriented commodities, SSA should consider diversification of export commodities in order to reduce shocks during economic hardships. The Oil and Gas sector, for example, accounts for 40% of Africa's exports (UNECA, 2020), and largely stands as a pillar of the economies of some SSA countries. This is the case for crude oil in Nigeria and Angola, constituting a share of around 90% of total exports (Onyekwenya & Ekeruche, 2020; Muntaka, 2020). Although the sector does not offer a large window of employment opportunities, revenues from the sector largely transform the socio-economic situation. Akami & Gabriel (2020) thus argue against the focus on monolithic reliance on oil and suggest economic diversification as a way to saddle through the

current economic uncertainties and instabilities. Oil exporting countries should opt for diversification to alternative sectors such as agriculture, solid mineral, manufacturing, and services.

A fair recovery essentially needs to build capacities of vulnerable groups and ensure that they prepare products to meet export standard requirements for both small-scale businesses and export-oriented commodities. The fisheries sector, for example, is essential for export promotion. Besides ensuring food security, the fisheries sector plays a significant role in improving people's social and economic situations. The sector supports the livelihood of 1.5 million people, with a contribution of 1.3% to the total African GDP (World Bank, 2020). In Senegal, particularly, the sector contributes about 7.1% to GDP (Mballo, 2018), and 2% in Tanzania (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries, 2016). The fisheries sector employs over 12 million African people, including 58% in fishing and 42% in the processing sector. This is significant as 59% of those employed in the fish processing sector are women (World Bank, 2020). Fish exports play a significant role in the contribution of foreign exchange; for example, in Tanzania, they account for 10% of all exports, sent to almost 47 countries (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries, 2016), and in Senegal, 14% of the total exports (Mballo, 2018).

The direct and indirect job creation is immense, particularly for women, as the number of women employed is greater than men, particularly in the small-scale processing and trading nodes of livestock (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries, 2016). The promotion of the fisheries sector requires potential market accessibility to both domestic (rural and urban) and foreign markets. Promotion of the fisheries supports the blue economy programme that the African Union promulgates in the Agenda for 2063, which highlights the key role that the ocean needs to play as a catalyst for socio-economic transformation (World Bank, 2020).

Foreign direct investment and management of illicit financial flows

Foreign direct investment (FDI) plays a key role in boosting African economies. FDI is a source of finance, employment and booster of production. However, with the disruption of global value chains due to the pandemic, FDI in Africa has seen a drastic drop. The UNCTAD's World Investment Report 2020 shows a decline of 72% in FDI (in the form of mergers and acquisition) in 2020 from the monthly average in 2019 (Chidede, 2020). The impact of the pandemic shows that SSA needs to do more than others, including ensuring an attractive environment for businesses and investment that link FDI with local business. Additional measures should be inward-looking, in terms of investment, rather than depending on FDI.

Similar internal measures should require the governments in SSA to control and orient illicit financial flows to serve as a source of investment in the recovery programmes. This entails transforming illicit financial flows into local investments, especially those investments that benefit vulnerable groups. According to the UNCTAD 2020 report, Africa loses around USD 89 billion each year through illicit flows. Such an amount is important as it is almost equal to Africa's combined Official Development Assistance (ODA) and FDI flows.

Promotion of STI and digitalisation

In all the above, science, technology and innovation (STI) is central. Investments in STI are vital for improving competitiveness, boosting production, and addressing inequality. STI capabilities are relevant for both social and economic wellbeing (Diyamett, 2021). As the world starts to envision the post-COVID-19 recovery phase, market competition will intensify as countries re-embark on industrialisation. In addition, investments in STI play a pivotal role in enhancing knowledge generation, efficiency, cost reduction, and competitiveness of products in the market. The current STI capacity in Africa is, however, low, and the impact of COVID-19 on access to knowledge, production, and distribution has reminded African countries to rethink the level of commitment they are currently putting in promoting STI. The STI strategy for Africa 2014-2024, for example, envisages allocation of 2% of the national budget for research and innovation. This is an important call for Africa to empower local research institutions to find solutions for COVID-19 and related challenges. The knowledge needed for the promotion of SMEs goes well beyond research and development; thus, governments and stakeholders need to facilitate access to alternative types of knowledge to promote growth. This includes training on the ability to locate, appraise, and select technologies from domestic and foreign sources. In doing so, special care should be taken for enterprises belonging to women and other vulnerable groups, which have traditionally been left behind in science and technology issues.

As part of STI, the expansion of digital technologies is particularly important in improving access to education and streamlining existing bureaucratic processes. For instance, digital technologies would have helped in addressing the issues of access to education during the pandemic; however, evidence shows that there was great inequality in terms of access to digital resources within the region. Therefore, post-COVID-19 recovery plans should ensure that students from all over the region have computers and internet connection facilities.

Similarly, digitalisation presents potential benefits in enhancing resource mobilisation that could finance the recovery process. In São Tomé and Príncipe, for example, the introduction of e-invoicing has allowed

authorities to expand the tax base into the country's informal sector, which has lifted revenues even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic (IMF, 2020).

Bilateral and regional cooperation

The final priority involves strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation. COVID-19 knows no borders (Apuuli, 2021); thus, Africa needs collective actions to address the impact of the pandemic by allowing economic activity to continue smoothly. Strengthening regional cooperation requires existing structures such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to add agenda items that focus on pandemic control and at the same time emphasise the importance of uninterrupted business activities. Mthembu (2020) emphasises the need for international partnerships to strategically support the creation and development of regional value chains, and promote manufacturing which will be vital in building back the lost growth momentum.

Further, benefits from cooperation also include the joint-financing of national initiatives implemented bilaterally. Health financing, for example, is recognised in the Africa Health Strategy 2016-2030 as a common shared responsibility (AU, 2015). This explains, for example, why the IMF quickly extended loans under the rapid credit facility (RCF) and the rapid financing instrument (RFI) as emergency financial support to low-income countries during the pandemic. For SSA, 25 countries were beneficiaries of the fund that was redirected from disasters to COVID-19 to support balance of payment requirements and pandemic responses through the government budget (Mira, 2020). SSA needs to extend cooperation with the private sector, international institutions and amongst national governments to ensure that there is sustainable financial, technical, and technological support.

■ Opportunities and implications for the 2030 Agenda

The above-mentioned priorities for SSA present a number of opportunities for regional efforts directed towards the achievement of the SDGs. The findings of this study show that investing time and resources in the recommendations mentioned above can particularly contribute to the Goals on poverty eradication, health and wellbeing, gender equality, decent work for all, and industry, innovation, and infrastructure.

First, Africa's demonstrated resilience to COVID-19, so far, ensures the immediate availability of human resources in enterprises and markets to stimulate rapid business recovery. In the health sector, for example, it is clear that COVID-19 is not the first disaster that the continent has experienced. Despite the fact that this pandemic has had a greater global socio-economic impact than other pandemics that have occurred

in the past, experiences gained over time from developing pandemic readiness measures have enhanced healthcare systems in SSA. This enabled the countries to be prepared with human and material resources to tackle COVID-19.

Despite the negative impact of the pandemic globally, for SSA, it also had some positive impacts. For example, the limited supply of important medical products, such as test kits, test reagents, gloves, sanitisers, face masks, hand washing reagents, personal protective equipment, and ventilators forced SSA to look inward and attain some level of self-reliance in the production of COVID-19 related medical supplies. Such domestic efforts have not only highlighted the additional avenues for investment and support, but that SSA has some capabilities in the manufacturing value chain that needs to be promoted. Furthermore, the pandemic has stimulated SSA countries to commit towards investing in health facilities. Countries have also improved the level of sanitation required for coping with COVID-19 SOPs dealing with prevention and caution. This window of opportunity for economic and technical transformation can lead to progress on key Goals related to economic growth, productivity, employment, and consumption.

Furthermore, Africa is increasingly committed to digitalisation that offers an important opportunity to ensure inclusive education. The importance of a digital economy has become abundantly clear during the pandemic, where different platforms for education, businesses, and professional work have been put in place, which have the capacity to reach a wide audience at minimal costs. This needs to be expanded to reach vulnerable groups. Tapping into these opportunities to ensure an inclusive and equitable recovery can contribute to addressing post-COVID-19 challenges and the 2030 Agenda.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted Africa's recent socio-economic gains. Like other regions and countries, African governments—despite their weak social and economic environments—have tried to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic through various economic policies. However, these responses have been disproportionate, and to a large extent, have not been in favour of the 2030 Agenda of 'leaving no one behind'. Thus, at a time when the world is debating measures to enable recovery from the pandemic, the SSA region needs to reflect on what it has achieved so far in terms of responses towards addressing the negative impacts of pandemic. Specifically, SSA should put in place inclusive policies to ensure that everyone participates and benefits from the reconstruction of the economy and improvement of the social and economic conditions of countries. A fair recovery is attainable, given the fact that the region has a number of opportunities, such as the richness of both human

and natural resources that have largely remained intact and need to be tapped. This study demonstrates how an all-inclusive recovery can be carried out by identifying the top priority areas, which include strengthening the healthcare system and the promotion of inclusive social and economic activities. It is hoped that if African governments and development partners can focus on the identified priority areas, not only will much of the impacts of the pandemic be addressed, but SSA will be put back on track to achieve the Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

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