



AFRICA: Opportunities for a robust COVID-19 recovery grounded on SDG 16

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The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant challenges for the African continent in achieving peace, justice and inclusive and effective institutions, including significant negative effects on economic, social and political conditions. This policy brief presents and discusses key trends on SDG 16 on the African continent, including: an increasing concentration and strengthening of executive power; shrinking civic space and enlarged restrictions on civil liberties and media independence; disproportionate effects for women and other vulnerable groups; the worsening of conflict triggers; and declining trust in institutions and rising corruption. To reverse these trends and strengthen progress towards the goal, this policy brief recommends that the digitalization process must be accelerated; social protection of vulnerable groups must be ensured; and institutional accountability structures must be built to strengthen public trust as a means to better support inclusive recovery efforts.

Introduction

As affirmed when the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015, sustainable development depends on peace, stability, respect for human rights and effective governance based on the rule of law (SDG 16). The COVID-19 crisis, however, has exacerbated many worrying trends that are stalling progress across the various dimensions of SDG 16 in the African region and as a result impeding progress on the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

COVID-19 was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020, and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As of July 2021, there were over 5.6 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 across Africa, with over 146,404 confirmed deaths caused by the virus (Africa CDC, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has, however, proved to be much more than a health crisis, with significant negative impacts on all facets of society—including political, economic and social, as well as security—and it threatens to leave deep scars for years to come. The pandemic has noticeably slowed the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in certain cases, even led to a reversal of progress made over the years.

Even before the onset of the pandemic, progress on SDG 16 in Africa was slow. Violence, conflict, terrorism and weak

state capacity across many countries resulted in negatively impacting the delivery of quality governance services and democratic dividends to the population. Understanding the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these factors is crucial to inform an effective recovery.

The power dynamics evolving across Africa are another important issue. Emergency powers and authorizations given to national and local governments to contain the pandemic are increasingly being misused and abused. Government responses to the pandemic have had significant human, economic and social consequences on the objectives of peace, justice and accountable institutions, especially in Africa, with potential long-term implications for civil liberties. The pandemic has undermined accountability and integrity, weakened democratic institutions, increased restrictions on the freedom of movement, led to the curtailment of basic freedoms, and created greater opportunities for fraud and corruption.

Despite the scale of the challenges, the threats emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic can also be transformed into an opportunity for the African region. For example, it represents an opportunity to rebuild trust, reinforce state capacity and chart a new pathway for development built on inclusive and responsive institutions. On the negative side, however, the emergency restrictions imposed because of COVID-19 represent a threat, where authoritarian power structures are



being consolidated by undercutting opposition voices and reducing media freedoms. These developments will lead to more exclusionary and less accountable institutions, undermining democratic processes and outcomes.

While the opportunities and threats to building inclusive institutions exist side-by-side, the pathway that African countries will follow is less clear and requires more analytical insight.

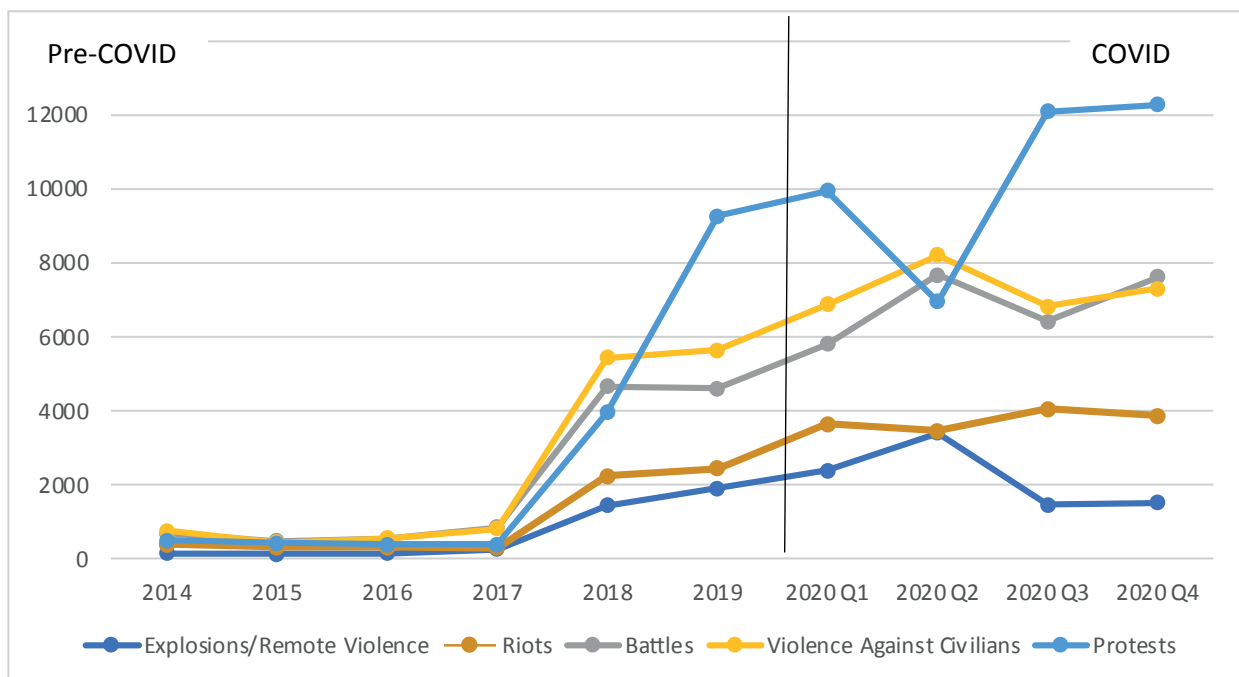
This policy brief evaluates emerging trends around SDG 16 arising from the COVID-19 pandemic within the African region. The brief also delves into how SDG 16 can act as a catalyst for robust recovery and resetting the path for progressive achievement of the SDGs. The brief draws on data generated from a series of stakeholder engagements across the continent, combined with the analysis of recent literature on COVID-19's impact on the African region. The African region's performance on SDG 16 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic is examined, followed by a look into the emerging trends around COVID-19 for Africa and key factors driving the observed trends. It concludes with recommendations for national and global actors on how to strengthen progress on SDG 16 and use it as a scaffold for recovery.

The African region's performance on SDG 16 (pre-pandemic)

Progress on SDG 16 in the African region was poor also prior to COVID-19. Between 2016 and 2019, public protests increased five-fold, violence against citizens ten-fold, explosions/remote violence twelve-fold and riots eight-fold (**Figure 1**). The trends in the incidence of violent conflicts and fatalities continued to increase in 2020 despite COVID-19 and containment measures that reduced mobility. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020), violent conflicts in Africa are mainly driven by weak state capacity, corruption, ineffective delivery of basic services, competition over natural resources, inequality and a sense of marginalization. Contestation over power and the legitimacy of the state is another driver of conflict in Africa. This signals that the conflicts are manifestations of multiple institutional failures and fragilities.

There has also been uneven progress across other areas of SDG 16 in the region. **Table 1** shows the data from the *Global State of Democracy* report (2019) illustrating the

Figure 1: Incidence of Violence and Conflicts in Africa 2014-2020



Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (2020). <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard>. Note that the quarterly data are annualized.



TABLE 1:

Trends in gains and declines related to SDG 16 targets in Africa between 2015 and 2018

		Number of African countries experiencing gains	Number of African countries experiencing declines
SDG 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	Personal Integrity and Security	3	1
SDG 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	Access to Justice	8	4
	Judicial Independence	4	6
	Predictable Enforcement	8	2
SDG 16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms	Absence of Corruption	7	2
SDG 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	Judicial Independence	4	6
	Effective Parliament	4	3
	Free Political Parties	1	1
	Civil Society Participation	1	3
SDG 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	Elected Government	1	0
	Clean Election	2	5
	Electoral Participation	4	5
	Effective Parliament	4	3
	Local Democracy	8	6
	Social Group Equality	3	2
SDG 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	Freedom of Expression	2	7
	Media Integrity	3	4
	Freedom of Movement	2	6
	Freedom of Religion	1	2
	Freedom of Association and Assembly	3	6

Source: International IDEA (2019), The Global State of Democracy. <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/global-state-of-democracy-2019>

number of African countries experiencing either a gain or decline on various SDG indicators between 2015 and 2018.¹ Indicators where more countries recorded gains than declines include personal integrity and security,² access to justice, the predictability of enforcement by public

officials, control of corruption, and the effectiveness of parliament and local democracy. Some of the countries experiencing positive gains include The Gambia, which transitioned from an authoritarian to a more democratic regime.

¹ For ease of interpretation, the cells are coloured green if the number of countries that recorded gains is higher than those experiencing declines; red if the number of countries that recorded declines is higher; and yellow if equal numbers of countries recorded gains and declines.

² This captures individuals' freedom from torture, forced labour and political killings.



However, there are more countries experiencing declines than gains in areas such as the independence of the judiciary, electoral management and civil liberties (media integrity and freedom of expression, of movement and of association). Overall, there are more declines (10) recorded than gains (9) on the SDG 16 indicators reviewed. Another way to view the results in **Table 1** is that the majority of African countries were not making progress on SDG 16 prior to the pandemic. Of the 54 African countries, a maximum of eight countries experienced a positive change on any of the indicators, and most experienced a decline or no progress. The concern therefore is that COVID-19 could derail these modest gains, while dragging down performance even further in other countries where progress has stalled or reversed.

The COVID-19 “African Paradox” and the role of institutions

COVID-19 has impacted the African region in two major ways. First is the health impact, which contrary to most expert predictions has not been as severe as expected. The other aspect is the severe effect of the pandemic on economic, social and political conditions, the repercussions of which are still emerging.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, assumptions were made about the effects the pandemic would have on the African continent. It was estimated that up to 190,000 African lives could be lost to the virus and that 29 million to 44 million people could get infected in the first year alone (WHO, 2020). By mid-June 2021, COVID-19 had infected only about 5.6 million people in Africa, less in per capita terms than any other region. At the end of 2021, as the Omicron variant spread, the number of cases increased significantly on the continent, but severe cases remained low (WHO, 2021).

This is being referred to as the “COVID-19 African Paradox”, in that, despite Africa’s developmental context and the pre-COVID slowdown of economic growth, its limited medical capacity and its already strained health sector, the countries in the region have been relatively successful in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several theories exist that attempt to explain this paradox. Some argue that limited testing is behind the reduced COVID numbers, and others speculate that the population has higher immunity. In some countries, governments continue to outright deny the

existence of COVID-19. The later arrival of the virus in Africa, a younger population, lower rates of co-morbidities and a favourable climate are also often cited as factors for the relatively reduced mortality rates on the continent. Despite the initial low prevalence of COVID-19 in the region, what is increasingly clear is that disparities in access to vaccines remain a challenge to the region, but this problem also has a significant impact globally.

While there has been no conclusive study on the initial low prevalence of COVID-19 in Africa, there is some consensus that quick and effective institutional responses to the crisis were a critical factor in minimizing the health impact on the continent. It is worth noting the prompt response of African nations at the onset of the pandemic. Following the announcement of the first COVID-19 case in Africa and catastrophic projections of the pandemic on the continent, governments across the region rushed to implement strict health measures. Some of the public health measures introduced included national lockdowns, closing borders, social distancing and the wearing of masks. The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) established the Africa Task Force for Novel Coronavirus with the aim of continental and regional collaboration in mitigating COVID-19 (African Union, 2020). The Task Force was established in early February 2020, even before the first case in Africa was detected.

The lessons from the Ebola epidemic and the subsequent adaptation of national health infrastructures have also enabled African countries to better prepare and deploy effective contact tracing and other mitigating factors. It can also be argued that the inclusion of Africans in the rooms of major decision-making has had positive outcomes for the continent. With African leadership roles in major organizations such as the World Health Organization, COVAX and the World Trade Organization (WTO), there is better coordination at the global and regional level. This highlights the importance of making progress around SDG 16.8 regarding broadening the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.

However, the management of the spill-over effects of the lockdowns has been less effective. The economic and institutional ramifications of COVID-19 have been severe on the continent. This could mean that the types of institutional framework needed for managing other aspects of the pandemic are lacking. For example, lockdowns require effective social protection, especially for the large informal



sector, which relies on a daily income. A limited fiscal space has also constrained pandemic policy responses across the region. For example, most African countries entered the COVID-19 pandemic under severe fiscal limitations, with high debt levels and revenue shortfalls. The pandemic further affected the continent's economic capacity, with weaker global demand and crashes in commodity prices. The economic response of governments in Africa has been subdued due to their limited financial capacity. The scale of spending to deal with the pandemic in African countries has differed greatly with the level in more developed regions. In February 2021, for example, the aggregate fiscal response by African governments amounted to US\$1.3 billion (2.9% of GDP), a meagre amount compared to about US\$5.2 trillion that the United States spent.

Public trust in government actions is essential, which in turn requires non-politicization of governance processes, broader inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making, and responsive and transparent provision of public services to mitigate lockdown effects. An inability to meet these needs has led to public protests and other violence in the region. The next section discusses the key emerging trends observed on SDG 16 in the African region following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

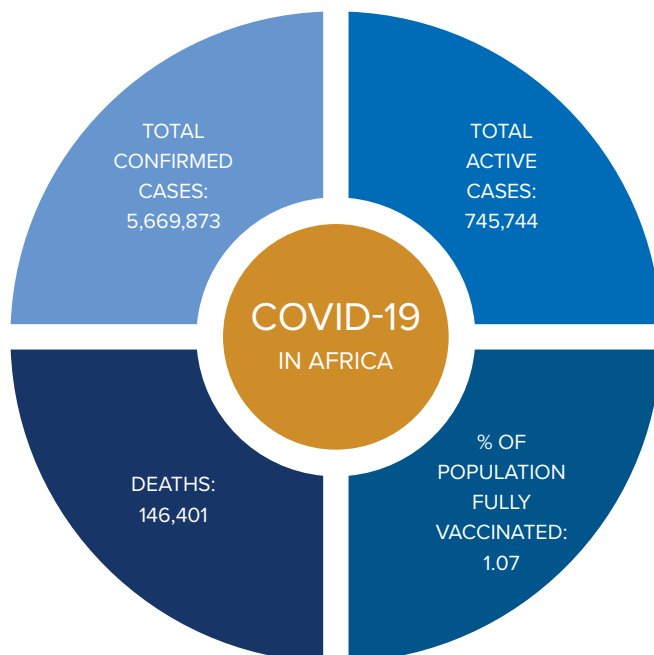
Emerging trends around SDG 16 in Africa since the pandemic

Several trends have emerged in Africa since the onset of the pandemic, highlighting how the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing conditions across the continent, such as increasing conflict and corruption. Some of the key emerging trends around SDG 16 include:

Centralization of power and opacity of rules

In many African countries, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the imposition of some emergency rules and containment measures. However, enforcement and opacity in the rules of engagement have created lapses and limited consideration for human rights and citizens' voice in COVID-19 control measures. As shown in **Figure 1**, the existing trends in violence, conflict and fatalities were not significantly altered in 2020 despite restrictions on movement and on economic and social activities in the period. However, higher incidences of violence and conflict were recorded in the first quarter of 2020, which coincided with a period of complete lockdown in many countries. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED, 2020) noted that the pandemic has, however, altered the motivation for violence

Figure 2: Snapshot of COVID-19 in Africa on 05 July 2021



Source: Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://africacdc.org/COVID-19/>



and demonstrations in Africa. Most incidents reported in the ACLED database in 2020 involved popular mobilization to protest against the harsh enforcement of new government regulations or to object to corrupt practices that limited delivery of and access to medical supplies or services.

The COVID-19 outbreak also affected electoral processes in Africa. More than 20 African countries were due to hold elections in 2020, but only a few did, with many local and national elections delayed (Africa News, 2020). Some elections and referenda were either held or postponed to favour outcomes benefiting those in power, based on considerations of strategic and political advantage. Most of the elections held were marked by low turnout and protests. The pandemic appears to have also resulted in strengthening the power of the executive branch over that of the parliamentary and judicial arms of government. Furthermore, the increase in the use of virtual courts to support the continued functioning of the justice systems may have unintentionally resulted in some cases in undermining accountability and limiting access to justice. In Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya, virtual court procedures are being used to resolve legal matters (Mayomi, 2020; Wanyonyi and Naeku, 2021), but there are concerns that virtual deliberations could negatively impact the quality of justice delivered when there may be significant learning lags for some groups and where access to virtual hearings may not be equal for all. Overall, these developments have implications for progress on SDG 16.1 (reduce all forms of violence), SDG 16.3 (rule of law and access to justice for all) and 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making) in Africa and may result in the reversal of democratic gains on the continent.

Threats to civil liberties

Implementing the national lockdowns and other restrictive measures to curb the spread of the virus has required stronger state involvement, and several governments in Africa have exploited these extraordinary measures for political purposes. In some cases, COVID-19 has been weaponized against opposition political parties and perceived critics in order to strengthen the position of the continent's executive strongmen. For example, in some cases, pandemic regulations have been heavily enforced with the objective of restricting freedom of expression and civil liberties and compromising media integrity.

In some countries, social distancing rules were enforced at times through a heavy-handed approach by security forces

(Sperber, 2020; Chabalala, 2020). There were many instances of police using excessive force to enforce lockdown rules, as armed violence against civilians in Africa increased and youth clashed with the police (ACLED, 2020). Shrinking civic space, uncontrolled state repression and the use of violence to suppress dissent using COVID-19 responses as a pretext have further undermined peace and human rights in Africa (Muhwezi et al., 2020).

In tracking COVID-19 enforcement in Africa, the 2019 Global State of Democracy report identified a major spike in threats to media freedom and independence. Some governments in the region sought to quell opposition by deploying strong measures targeting media houses critical of their COVID-19 response. One major concern is that trends to adopt tactics that abuse civil liberties will remain at high levels, despite a gradual recovery from the pandemic. The socio-political shifts seen due to COVID-19 have fundamentally changed power dynamics in many countries, further strengthening those already in power. This may result in a situation in many contexts where power is retained and consolidated by entrenched groups—and this situation becomes the new normal.

Disproportionate effects on women

The pandemic has affected different population groups disproportionately as a result of pre-existing structural inequalities that render some groups more vulnerable than others. Women were already exposed to different forms of violence before the pandemic—globally, an estimated one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence inflicted by an intimate partner or non-partner at some point in their life. The COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified this gendered violence across the world, especially during lockdowns, a phenomenon that United Nations Women refer to as the “shadow pandemic” (UNWomen, 2020).

At the start of the pandemic, the East African Community (EAC) Partner States reported a sharp rise in the number of gender-based violence (GBV) cases (East African Community, 2021). Ministries responsible for gender across the region saw a 48 percent increase in GBV cases reported to the police or through GBV toll-free lines. In the Central African Republic, reported injuries to women and children spiked by 69%; GBV increased by an estimated 10% from April to December 2020; rape by 27%; and other assaults by 45%. In Egypt, there was a 19% increase in violence against family members linked to the strict measures being implemented to limit the spread of COVID-19, according to a survey by UN



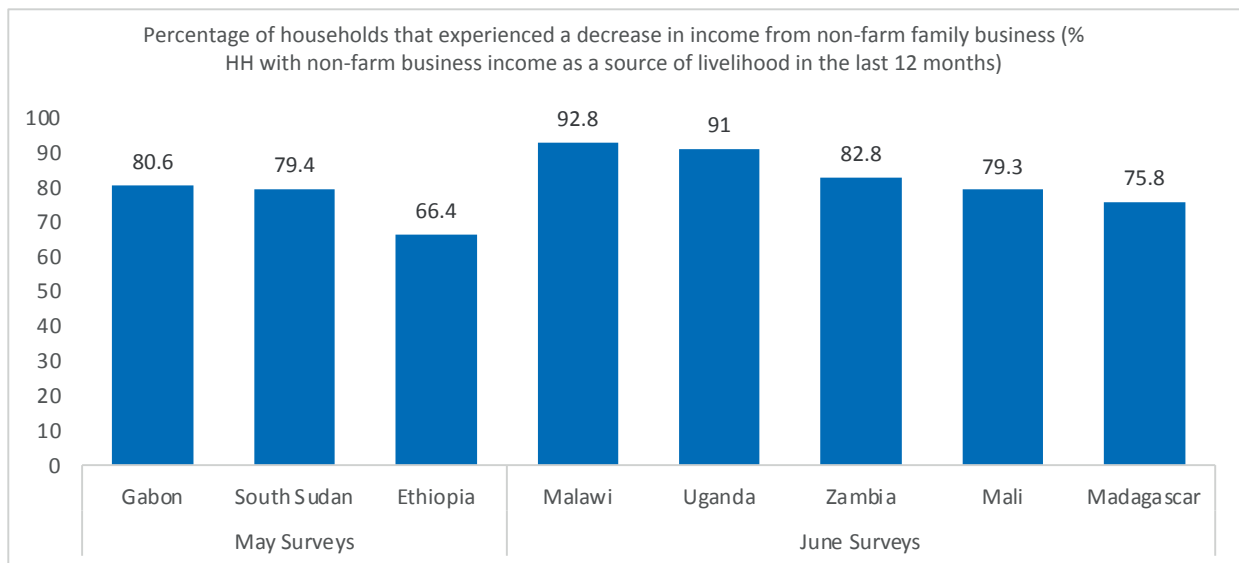
Women Egypt and Baseera. In South Africa, official reports show that, within the first week of a strict lockdown, South African Police Services received 2,320 complaints of gender-based violence, with only 148 related charges made. In Nigeria, reports from 24 states across the country showed that, after lockdown measures were enacted on 31 March, the number of reported incidents of domestic violence spiked by 56% during the first two weeks of April compared with the same period in March. (African Union et al., 2020).

The pandemic has been considerably more detrimental to the informal sector, as workers there are less equipped than in the formal sector to adapt to changes forced by the pandemic, such as digitalization. Numerous individuals in the informal sector lost jobs due to this immobility and the difficulty to adapt. Women are heavily concentrated in the informal sector, and the restrictions on movement have disrupted their income sources. Out-of-school girls and adolescents also face a greater risk of early and forced marriage, sexual abuse and unintended pregnancy during such emergencies (Iversen, 2020). Thus, the pandemic has worsened gender inequalities and escalated social injustices (GAPS, 2020). With online learning, cases of online abuse, harassment and the exploitation of children have been on the increase as well.

Triggers and stressors of conflict are rising

Worsening gender inequality, deepening social and economic inequalities, poor human capital development, poverty, unemployment and food insecurity are among the major causes of rising violent extremism in Africa, and all of these conflict triggers have worsened in the wake of the global COVID-19 outbreak. Lockdown and movement restrictions imposed to reduce the transmission of coronavirus have disrupted production, transport and access to affordable food, effectively turning pre-existing food crises into disasters. In Ethiopia, two-thirds of households witnessed a decline in their source of income and the quantity of food purchased (Abay et al., 2020), while in Kenya, 88 percent of the surveyed households from informal settlements had little access to food during the lockdown measures (Shupler et al., 2020). In Nigeria, a monthly rapid phone survey conducted during a COVID-19 lockdown shows that more than half of the surveyed households were unable to purchase two key staple foods: rice and cassava (Ekeruche and Adeniran, 2021). As of April 2021, the World Bank estimated that 40 million Africans have been pushed into extreme poverty during the pandemic (World Bank, 2021). **Figure 3** also shows that at least a third of the population in non-farm business have experienced an income loss during COVID-19. This has implications for conflict, and especially for violent extremism,

Figure 3: Household income losses in COVID-19 times



Source: World Bank (2021), COVID-19 High-Frequency Monitoring Dashboard.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/interactive/2020/11/11/covid-19-high-frequency-monitoring-dashboard>



as the decline in income and legitimate livelihoods may result in increased vulnerability to recruitment (Graff, 2010).

The economic response from governments is limited by their fiscal capacity, and social protection coverage is minimal across the continent. In fact, initial lockdown measures were reversed in many African countries due to the inability to sufficiently support vulnerable populations. Such conditions and challenges, if not well addressed, will further aggravate vulnerabilities and grievances, thus creating conditions that can quickly spark violence.

Declining trust in institutions and rising corruption practices

The perception of and satisfaction with public services and institutional performance is an important indicator for SDG 16 (World Bank, 2021), and, as with other parts of the world, Africa has not fared very well in this regard. Public trust in key governance institutions was declining even before COVID-19, and the pandemic has only accelerated the trend. This is mainly because the urgency of measures meant to mitigate the crisis created more opportunities for corruption among public officials, while the need to expedite procurement and lower budgetary oversight have been exploited in some countries to enrich those in power. For example, there were reported cases of poor utilization of COVID-19 funds across Africa, as response measures were marred by gross irregularities, poor planning, dubious contracts and corruption scandals (Reuters, 2020). Occurrences of impropriety regarding COVID-19 funds were found across all the different global regions, including in Africa where cases of corruption in four countries alone amounted to \$7.7 million (Transparency International, 2020).

Apart from procurement-related corruption, there were reported irregularities in identifying beneficiaries of COVID-19 relief items such as food and masks. The lack of transparency and increasing corruption even amid the ongoing global health crisis has eroded public trust in government institutions. In many instances, this degenerated into violent public demonstrations. In Nigeria, for example, anger over police brutality and the unequal distribution of palliatives and relief packages related to COVID-19 resulted in widespread youth-led protests (Orjinmo, 2020). Public trust in institutions in the region appears to be at an all-time low, and this is likely to negatively affect the achievement of the SDGs by 2030, including SDG 16 (Afrobarometer, 2021). This not only impedes the effectiveness of crisis response measures to

the pandemic but also undermines the legitimacy of government leaders and democratic institutions. All this signals that post-pandemic institutions might be weaker, thereby creating cracks that could reverse progress on SDG 16.

Policy recommendations

Adopting digitalization to support recovery efforts

The pace of recovery in different countries will often be dependent on the quality of economic and social support structures in place, including digital and technological infrastructure. This is especially important in the wake of the coronavirus crisis and the impact it has had on digitalization in Africa, including the role technology can play in improving governance and boosting public participation. Perhaps the most important upside of the pandemic is the widespread rapid transformation occurring on the continent in the realm of information and communication technologies (ICT). Businesses have had to leverage digital tools for continued economic activities amid movement restrictions, and even government institutions have relied on ICT infrastructure for communication and public education, court processes and governance. This trend has sparked some optimism regarding the potential for technology to further support institutional development for open data, accountability and transparency, as well as greater civil society participation. The use of ICT holds promise for ensuring transparency and accountability in governance and for improving the way governments interact with their citizens. It can help leaders renew the social contract, reduce corruption and rebuild trust with their people. However, for society to maximize the gains from technology, the digital divide facing different population groups in access to and the adoption of technology must be addressed so that this does not become another driver of inequality.

Deploying social protection for vulnerable populations and businesses

In Africa, there have been significant gaps in social protection coverage, particularly for those working in the informal sector where insecurity has been exacerbated during the pandemic lockdowns. Low-income households, the elderly, women and other members of the population who are particularly vulnerable to financial difficulties need to be adequately covered by comprehensive social protection



schemes. While economic growth remains an important factor in national poverty reduction and recovery efforts, targeted social protection will be required especially for the vulnerable population who may not directly benefit from any dividends from economic growth.

Beyond support for households, social welfare measures should also extend to businesses, especially small and medium enterprises, in order to sustain livelihoods and employment. This is necessary particularly in the informal economy, as informal workers do not have access to most of the financial protection afforded to formal workers in crises like the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also spurred innovation in the social protection landscape in Africa, such as the use of tax relief (as in Senegal and Madagascar), a freeze on utility bills and a waiver of fees for basic services (Niger), and the use of digital platforms for delivery (Nigeria). These innovations can strengthen social protection frameworks post-COVID-19 and help to limit potential abuse and corruption in the system.

Strengthening the accountability of state institutions

Across the region, corruption and trust in institutions remain major challenges that have been aggravated by the pandemic. This requires institutional reforms that reinforce systems of accountability as well as checks-and-balances in government operations. A systematic assessment of government responses to the pandemic is also needed to identify key strengths and weaknesses. Just as most African countries relied on systems established to respond to the Ebola virus epidemic to address the COVID-19 pandemic, there should likewise be institutional learning from the current crisis to inform future response systems. The review process should also be able to identify sources of tension and distrust and indicate ways to rebuild state capacity so as to help to restore public confidence that governance systems really can deliver for people. This will require independent processes of auditing and assessment, for example, through regional accountability initiatives like the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Reinforcing inclusive institutions and processes

The pandemic has had disproportionate effects on different marginalized groups across the continent, reinforcing

pre-existing structural inequalities and the unequal distribution of power. The exclusion of groups like youth and ethnic and religious minorities from decision-making has often exacerbated distrust and social disunity. For example, across several African countries, youth populations have risen in protest against the state. Institutions must be inclusive in decision-making to ensure that any measures taken can adequately respond to the priorities of marginalized groups. Inclusivity and the amplification of a diversity of voices will aid in building trust and reducing corruption. Empowering marginalized groups and making their voices count in decision-making processes will be crucial in developing inclusive institutions. Also, deepening democracy and bringing fairness to electoral processes is another dimension of strengthening institutions. Therefore, the emerging threat to electoral management and efforts to circumvent election processes should be stemmed by putting in place stronger oversight mechanisms.

In Africa, it is critical to redefine and rebuild the social contract between governments and the population. The rise in violence in the recent period points to a breakdown in the existing social contracts and in trust. In this sense, ensuring the necessary social investments, forging effective collaboration and combating pervasive corruption are all critical. Responding to the COVID-19 crisis by delivering health care and social protection via equitable, open and accountable systems may help governments build trust with citizens. To strengthen the social contract, effective communication is vital. Civil society also has a role to play through supporting accountability and openness in government activities.

Enhancing policy and institutional coordination

Policy and institutional coordination are extremely important for several reasons, most especially for the clarity and speed of effective government action. The coordination witnessed in Africa at the start of the pandemic was a major contributing factor to Africa's successful response and its low death toll. Fostering transparency and alignment between institutions on a local, national and international scale will ensure not only that any actions taken are effective but also that they benefit from experience and knowledge across similar contexts. As the region moves into the recovery phase, institutional coordination remains vital for success. Building and leveraging existing regional multilateral institutions will support regional coordination. Regional coordination in health responses through the Africa Taskforce



for Novel Coronavirus and economic cooperation through the creation of a Continental Solidarity Anti-COVID-19 Fund are two important collaborative efforts that can be replicated at the subregional and national level. As for the local level, replicating this means creating an institutional framework for various segments of the society to exchange information and share solutions.

Drawing on global resources

There are tangible ways that the broader global community can help strengthen institutional development in Africa. One way is through supporting mechanisms for data and evidence generation to improve the quality of public policy. The global community can also support independent actors who are involved in knowledge generation, especially actors and voices based within the region. In addition, given the growing importance of digitalization for African recovery and the comparative advantage that developed countries have in this aspect, providing technical and financial support, technological exchange and access to global markets can help to fast-track development in this area.

Gender equality and women's participation in decision-making

Women's absence in leadership, decision-making and peacekeeping in Africa continues to be a serious problem. Recovery efforts will be weakened without an inclusive structure for women's voices in decision-making and implementation. Given that the economic effect of the pandemic is greater in the informal sector where women are predominant, targeted support to such jobs will be crucial. Stronger implementation and enforcement of existing laws against gender-based violence are also needed to support women's empowerment and deliver on SDG 16.

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