



Policy Brief - March 2021

Impact of the Covid19 epidemic on the availability of healthcare in Africa

Context to Research

From the start of the pandemic to March 2021, more than 117 million people have contracted the Covid19 infection worldwide resulting in nearly 2.6 million deaths, according to the Covid-19 Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at John Hopkins University. According to the World Health Organization, Africa in the same period reported nearly 4 million confirmed cases, i.e., 3.3% of the cases reported worldwide and more than 106, 000 deaths.

COVID collateral damage : reduced availability of HIV, TB, and malaria services

Covid-19 has reduced the supply of services to fight HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The results of these programs have not improved over the previous year's data at the same period.

During the WAHO meeting in June 2020, it was noted that in most African countries measures to prevent infection to Covid-19 (social distancing, limitation of travels, closure of small shops and restaurants) has led to a decrease in health centers attendance with a drop in the performance of HIV screening results, ARV treatment and routine distribution of mosquito nets and treatments, especially for children. Stock shortages related to drug supply delays and caregiver absenteeism impacting the availability of services were also noted.

Greater mortality from COVID-19 among people living with HIV

During the same meeting, it was indicated that the people affected by HIV or Tuberculosis were 3 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than the general population, according to preliminary data from Cape Town, South Africa, presented by the WHO. Similarly, an epidemiological model (EPI) predicts that a six-month interruption of treatment would double the risk of death in a patient with HIV, according to UNAIDS.

The economic impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods

It should also be noted that the economic impact of the Covid-19 created by the prevention measures in countries where 40 to 50% of people live below the poverty line and 60% in the informal sector will be very important. The impact on small service providers, restaurateurs, transporters and even education workers is all the more worrying as it risks pushing these already economically vulnerable populations below the poverty line and leading to additional difficulties in accessing health services that

will in turn undermine programmatic gains that were so hard to achieve(1).

Faced with this situation, responses have been given and assessments are underway and will permit to better refine this impact on countries with an already very fragile health system(2), and that benefited from significant investments to reach their current level, but which are still far from achieving the results of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) with regard to health. These include maternal and infant mortality rate.

What are the next steps and opportunities for African countries?

The pandemic created by the 2019 new corona virus has shown that health systems around the world and particularly in Africa are fragile and not sufficiently resilient and responsive to provide an adequate response to the Covid-19 pandemic, thus endangering the global health security.

It is all the more critical to tackle this problem as discussions are underway as part of the Global Fund's new strategy. Indeed, the strengthening of health systems is a strategic axis with a view to sustaining the gains and attempting to achieve the next goals of eliminating diseases by 2030.

To this end, according to the AFD (the French Development Agency)(3), a quarter of the resources of the Global Fund are currently already dedicated to strengthening the health system. Discussions on the strengthening strategy and its modalities are also underway and have already resulted in

Will Africa be able to seize this opportunity to strengthen its health system in order to ensure health security for its population? Discussions with African leaders, ministers of health and ministers of finance have taken place and are continuing on the response strategy to the Covid19 epidemic. What are the opportunities for African countries to mobilize more funds as part of the post 2022 strategy of the Global Fund for universal health coverage and health security?

The following guidelines and Recommendations⁴

- 1 Funding from the Global Fund gives priority to the poorest and most fragile health and community systems whose populations are the most vulnerable
- 2 A better appreciation of the socioeconomic components that can help end the epidemic will be reinforced (equity in access to care for a reduction in user fees)
- 3 The Global Fund's commitment should take into account the lessons learnt through the Covid-19 epidemic as a means of acceleration
- 4 The development of the next post 2022 strategy should be part of a process of perpetuating and revising the operating mode and procedures of the Global Fund over longer planning periods for system strengthening
- 5 The SI to Find Missing TB Cases should support implementation science research studies addressing each step of the care cascade to highlight all the gaps experienced by missing cases; interventions could subsequently be tailored and targeted to specific and general contexts and could include community DOT.

References

1. https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10428/covid19_2020-12-09-situation_report_en.pdf
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsVRgmGofCo>
3. <https://www.afd.fr/fr/actualites/agenda/repenser-limplication-du-fonds-mondial>
4. <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/strategy/>
5. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200603/communique-joint-ministerial-meeting-ministers-finance>

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