

Africa Responds to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Various states have ordered lockdowns while economic toll continues to mount

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There are 55 member-states within the African Union (AU) where 1.2 billion people reside.

Governments throughout the continent have taken initiatives to reduce the threat of COVID-19 cases which have been confirmed in a majority of countries.

The Republic of South Africa, the most industrialized state with a population of 60 million, has the second largest number of confirmed cases within the AU. **President Cyril Ramaphosa** during late March ordered a lockdown to prevent further community transmission of the virus.

On April 22, the Minister of Health, **Dr. Zweli Mkhize**, reported to the media that there are 3,635 confirmed cases inside the country resulting in 65 deaths. Mkhize said that 134,000 tests had been administered with nearly 6,900 carried out over a 24 hour period.

Ramaphosa has deployed 3,000 members of the South African National Defense Forces (SANDF) to assist medical and security personnel in the implementation of the lockdown. The government has established quarantine centers utilizing sports stadiums to contain people who may have violated the social distancing protocols placing themselves at risk for exposure and infection.

These measures have created additional problems both socially and economically. Many people living in various areas of the country cannot shelter-in-place due to the necessities of earning a living. Others live in crowded households where there is not enough space to effectively minimize distancing.

Ramaphosa announced on April 22, that 73,000 SANDF troops were being placed on standby as he prepared to make announcements about the status of the COVID-19 prevention policies in effect now for four weeks. The escalation of military preparedness could be in response to the reports of attacks on delivery trucks carrying food and the unsuccessful attempt by some people to break into stores at a shopping mall in Mitchell Plains near Cape Town.

People who cannot work from their homes are suffering due to the lack of income. Desperation has increased for the marginalized sectors of the working class already subjected to an official unemployment rate of 29%.

South African **Minister of Defense Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula** commented on the decision to deploy and place on standby tens of thousands of troops, saying:

“If you look at the numbers and the rate at which the infection has gone up, you will realize that at some point we may actually need the kind of human deployment which has never been seen before.” (See [this](#))

In light of the economic impact of the pandemic and the subsequent closing of the economy, Ramaphosa has announced the enactment of a stimulus package which could assist people in coping with the uncertainty. The package, worth \$US26 billion, is designed to bolster businesses and provide income for three million workers.

Kenya Maintains Emergency Measures amid Pandemic

Kenya, the largest economy in East Africa, has been under a state of emergency for the last month. **President Uhuru Kenyatta** has addressed the country on a regular basis to encourage compliance with the restrictions on gatherings and movements. (See [this](#))

The Kenyan Health Ministry is providing regular updates on the number of infections and deaths from the pandemic. The country which relies heavily on tourism, agricultural and light industrial production has experienced a rapid decline in its national income.

As of April 22, Kenya has confirmed over 300 cases among the 15,000 people tested. 14 people have died from COVID-19 and 83 reportedly have fully recovered.



South African soldiers enforce lockdown amid COVID-19 pandemic

Healthcare officials are concerned about the high rate of asymptomatic infections. A [report in the Daily Nation](#) noted this phenomenon in the case of one patient noting that:

“Mr. Kevin Aura, 26, is one of the patients considered to be asymptomatic, who now account for almost half of the confirmed cases in Kenya. As daily numbers of confirmed cases rise, the ministry says there is evidence of asymptomatic cases, sparking fear of unwitting community transmission.”

Nigeria Takes Action to Protect Africa's Most Populous State

Lagos, the commercial capital of the West African state of Nigeria, whose national population is 206 million, has been under a lockdown since late March when **President Muhammadu Buhari** addressed the nation on the current impact of the virus on this oil-producing state. Since the first case was detected on February 27, the federal government has halted all international and domestic passenger flights, shuttered educational institutions while expanding the lockdown to Abuja and Ogun states.

Buhari announced on March 29 that the country was working with the People's Republic of China to develop measures for containing the spread of COVID-19 and the treatment of patients. The president emphasized the need to follow the guidelines developed by medical professionals in Nigeria.

In his speech on March 29 Buhari said:

“Indeed, the Director General of the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) was one of ten global health leaders invited by the World Health Organization to visit China and understudy their response approach. I am personally very proud of Dr. Ihekweazu for doing this on behalf of all Nigerians. Since his return, the NCDC has been implementing numerous strategies and programs in Nigeria to ensure that the adverse impact of this virus on our country is minimized. We ask all Nigerians to support the work the Federal Ministry of Health and NCDC are doing, led by the Presidential Task Force.” (See [this](#))

As of April 20, Nigeria's health authorities had confirmed 86 new cases of COVID-19, the highest daily increase since the outbreak bringing the total number of cases to 627. Statistics compiled by the NCDC illustrates that the epidemic is spreading at a more rapid rate over the last month.

Nigeria has confirmed 21 fatalities while 170 people have been released from hospitals after making a full recovery.

Egypt Confronts Pandemic and the Economic Impact

As of April 22, Egypt had the highest number of COVID-19 cases on the African continent. The ministry of health reported 169 new coronavirus illnesses and 12 additional deaths. These figures brought the number of confirmed coronavirus infections in Egypt to 3,659 while the number of deaths climbed to 276. The health ministry also announced that 935 people had recovered from the disease.

The pandemic has influenced the way in which the Egyptian parliament conducts its business. A session of the House of Representatives designed to enhance the authority of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi to take measures to stem the spread of COVID-19 was conducted with limits on the number of people present in the chambers.

[Al-Ahram](#), the state-sponsored daily newspaper, reported on the amendments to several articles of the constitution, saying:

“The 17 new powers include the right to close schools and universities, shut down certain ministries, authorities and companies entirely or partially, postpone the payment of water, electricity and natural gas bills entirely or

partially, and compel Egyptian expatriates returning home to undergo necessary health and quarantine measures.

The powers also give the president the authority to allocate cash and in-kind assistance to individuals and families, offer financial support for medical research, provide financial and in-kind support to damaged economic sectors, postpone the payment of certain taxes, and turn schools and youth centers into field hospitals.”

As Ramadan approaches, the way in which the Islamic season is celebrated has drastically changed in Egypt. Houses of worship have been ordered closed due to the pandemic and gathering of large numbers of people are prohibited.

AU Encourages Continental Effort to Eradicate Pandemic

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia is the headquarters of the AU Commission which has been monitoring the spread of COVID-19 across the region. Figures published on the AU website indicate that 52 countries are reporting 21,096 infections and 1,055 deaths. Some 4,974 people have recovered from the disease.

Two AU member-states, the Union of Comoros and the Kingdom of Lesotho, have no confirmed cases. Lesotho has been under a lockdown for several weeks. The country is completely surrounded by South Africa, which has over 3,600 cases. Both Lesotho and the Union of Comoros are members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which is a regional affiliate of the AU.

[Daily reports](#) are being issued by the African Center for Disease Control and Prevention (ACDC), an agency within the AU. According to its website:

“Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) is a specialized technical institution of the African Union established to support public health initiatives of member states and strengthen the capacity of their public health institutions to detect, prevent, control and respond quickly and effectively to disease threats. Africa CDC supports African Union Member States in providing coordinated and integrated solutions to the inadequacies in their public health infrastructure, human resource capacity, disease surveillance, laboratory diagnostics, and preparedness and response to health emergencies and disasters.”

These objectives are closely linked to the social, political and economic capacity of AU member-states to address healthcare concerns on the continent. The AU Commission has acknowledged the economic impact of the pandemic on the various economies throughout the region.

A [Voice of America \(VOA\) report](#) noted in early April that:

“Researchers at the AU now believe the continent will slip into a recession this year due to the impact the coronavirus is currently having on trade, remittances, tourism and a huge fall in global oil prices. An AU report seen by VOA estimates governments will lose around \$270 billion from lost trade. The report, first published by Reuters, also says governments will need at least \$130 billion in additional public spending to fight the virus.”

The advent of COVID-19 will surely bring into existence a deeper discussion on the future economic policies for AU member-states. Priorities related to centralized planning, the empowerment of working people, women, youth and farmers, the necessity for the training and retention of healthcare professionals, are all essential for the strengthening of Africa in order to confront the present crisis and those which will surface in the future.

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