

# Editorial

## COVID-19 IN AFRICA: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

### Guest Editors

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Like a thief in the night, the COVID-19 epidemic has taken much from the world, and Africa is no exception. Lives were lost, and global economies lost much in income and the workforce. Many such economies have not recovered from the economic shocks even today. The devastation was particularly worse in Africa, where most economies are third-world economies relying on subsistence agriculture and raw material manufacturing. Most of the economies in the African continent do not process the mineral they produce, nor do they process their crops but instead export them with little value addition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected unemployment because many firms had to be closed during different stages of lockdown in the respective African countries. Many people had to be laid off, mainly in the informal and small business sectors. The effect on unemployment was very severe in that unemployment statistics was 34,4% in the second quarter of 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Consequently, poverty worsened in parts of Africa and across the globe. Munzhedzi and Phago (2020) posit that local government was also hugely affected by the pandemic because development initiatives were either delayed or abruptly stopped. Local governments could not achieve their constitutional mandates in that municipal budgets had to be reconsidered and re-tabled because of the need to change priorities and purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) and other COVID-19 necessities. Due to their limited financial, personnel, and material resources, the pandemic particularly hit rural communities. (Mubangizi & Mubangizi, 2021) . Unemployment harmed the revenue collection of municipalities in that fewer people within the jurisdiction of a municipality have the income to pay for rates and municipal services. Less revenue for the municipality means limited municipal service delivery. To make matters worse, so much money was spent irregularly, wastefully, and fruitlessly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Auditor-General, 2020). Due procurement processes were not followed, and this is against policy prescripts. Public and municipal procurement and corruption are like



inseparable twins in that most of the corrupt practices in the public sector are in the public procurement processes (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss, 2011; Munzhedzi, 2016). Even worse is that most of public institutions cannot effect punishment on offenders even when legislative and policy frameworks are clear on the sanctions to be taken.

Having advanced the preceding argument, it must be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic did not simply bring about bad things. There are many good things that were ushered in by the COVID-19 pandemic, including but not limited to greater use of technology in academia, business and administrative processes. Due to changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings are held online through Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms. Delegates who would otherwise have to travel more than a thousand kilometres to a workshop or conference before the pandemic attend these meetings online, which is way cheaper and more convenient. Television news networks have regularised interviewing their political, economic and social commentators using these platforms for convenience. These commentators do not have to be in news studios physically like before the pandemic. Most institutions of higher learning have adopted measures of conducting both formative and summative assessments online through Moodle, Brightspace, and Blackboard, just to mention a few. To a greater extent, not only is money saved through less travel, but the implication is that there are fewer congestions on the public roads because of these preferred online platforms. To a particular extent, network service providers had to be on their feet to develop advanced systems and platforms of technology so that theirs could be the preferred platforms. For example, Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms can generate attendance registers and divide a more extensive group into smaller, manageable sections.

The way of doing business has changed due to lessons learned during the pandemic. There are businesses whose preferred transactions are online. Namely, eWallet, Instant money, and Cash send to mention a few. This was preferable than exchanging cash physically all in the name of managing COVID-19 pandemic spreading and infections (Nalubega & Uwizeyimana 2019). At some point, restaurants could only transact with customers who were transacting online. Customers were not allowed to do contact visits to these restaurants and shops. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has refined the administrative processes and operations well. For instance, a memorandum that had to be physically taken to four or five offices for recommendations and approval is now sent through SharePoint or email. The approval process, which often took the entire week, now takes a few minutes through the said online platforms, which many institutions adopted after the emergence of the pandemic. The public institutions have not only experienced the negative effect of the COVID-19 pandemic but the positive side as well. These



measures, which came about due to the pandemic, positively contribute to the academic, economic and technological sectors.

The mode of learning in most institutions of higher learning is now blended as opposed to the traditional teaching method where a lecturer would be in front of their full capacity class. Blended means that classes are either in contact or online. Online platforms are now preferable because they are cheaper and more convenient. A student from a village in the Eastern Cape or Limpopo provinces of South Africa is able to attend a class online from a University in Durban or Cape Town, for example. This means that the student has saved on residence and transport fees. These institutions of higher learning no longer need bricks and mortar classes that may house more than 1000 students because an online platform is available. All these were not an option before the pandemic.

Recovery from the pandemic is a slow but ongoing process; as a society, we have learned a lot from the pandemic. In this Issue of the *African Journal of Governance and Development*, academics on the African continent reflect on various governance processes to make governments and their institutions more efficient. Effective governments will probably create resilient communities, and resilient communities ought to be prepared to survive pandemics and future crises.

The article by **Francis Sibanda** and **Luvuyo Ntombana** sought to look at the interdependent relationship between higher education institutions and cities in the Global South. East London was used as a case study of a city confronted by an assortment of challenges yet gifted with competitive advantages for a knowledge-based economy. The city has no less than three institutions of higher learning and a youthful population, which gives it the potential for growth and development. The article posits a gap between what institutions of higher learning produce and what the industry requires. This is indeed problematic for the city of East London and other similar cities. It recommends that institutions for higher learning should transform their curricula to align with the economy's demands.

**Arthur Moraka Shopola's** article focused on the cooperative governance between municipalities in the district-local space, often bedevilled by severe collective action problems. The article sought to investigate the appropriateness and the capacity of the District Intergovernmental Forum (DIF) as a platform to deal with multi-governance issues within the two-tier district system with Mopani District Municipality used as a case study. It is argued in the article that the diversity of challenges hampers the symbiotic relations between district and local municipalities. In particular, the DIF's mandates are poorly defined, and the legislation is silent on how districts could support local municipalities. The article recommends that the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act 13 of 2005 be amended to offer DIF more powers to sanction municipalities on their non-attendance of their meetings.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a buzzword around the globe, including in Africa. **Eric Blanco Niyitunga's** article sought to assess the prospects and opportunities of AI in Africa



with a specific focus on addressing the multiplicities of challenges in public healthcare that prevent good health achievement for sustainable development. The article reiterates that AI technologies may play a fundamental role in the public healthcare system in that they may protect healthcare providers, quickens treatment and administrative tasks, and, most importantly, promotes innovations in the healthcare systems. AI technologies could be used to effectively and efficiently address many administrative delays and irregularities. AI technologies could effectively and efficiently manage many administrative delays and irregularities. The article by Niyitunga recommends that more African countries adopt AI technologies in their public healthcare system to advance efficiency and innovation.

**Alouis Chilunjika, Kudakwashe Intauno, Dominique Uwizeyimana and Sharon Chilunjika** discussed in their article the dynamics of patronage politics and the tendering processes at Zimbabwe's State Procurement Board. The article argues that public procurement may play a pivotal role as far as the economic progress of developing countries is concerned. Unfortunately, based on the data collected in Zimbabwe, the article found widespread transparency deficiencies in tendering processes, political interference and increasing tender corruption. There is a negative effect on the provision of public services because a substantial number of services that are rendered through public procurement in Zimbabwe. The article suggests using ICT to address some of these issues with public procurement by reducing human interaction, preventing political meddling and putting punitive measures in place.

COVID-19 lockdowns introduced to deal with the pandemic have affected income distribution, households, unemployment, and health and social protection in South Africa. This is because many of the basic services were suspended, including local and international flights. The article by **Ntombi W Gamede** sought to review the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown measures on income distribution in South Africa. Her study established that the lockdown measures introduced in South Africa harmed employment, production, and demand, which resulted in a decline in the demand and supply of many sectors. This had a massive effect on income distribution in the country. Unfortunately, the article contended that the COVID-19 pandemic lowered and worsened the existing inequality in income distribution and poverty in South Africa.

**Stanley Egenti and Mulugeta F Dinbabo's** article is about the Fadama III project, an ongoing agricultural intervention that seeks to alleviate poverty and food insecurity among smallholder farmers in Nigeria. This is because Nigeria has close to 100 million citizens living below the poverty line, as the World Bank prescribes. The Fadama III project was found to contribute significantly to the achievement of SDG 1 and SDG 2 in Nigeria. However, it was found that most of the smallholder farmers have lower education levels in the form of secondary education only. **Mathebula Ntwanano Erasmus and Tyanai Masiya** wrote about state capture at state-owned enterprises in South Africa, specifically



focusing on Eskom and Transnet. **Mathebula and Masiya** use Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory to explain the challenges of state-owned enterprises. **Mathebula and Masiya** propose possible solutions to the rampant state capture, including relooking and reexamining their relevance in the South African context.

In her article, **Kefilwe Johanna Dithlake** presents the key findings of a more extensive qualitative study focused on the complexities of professionalising community development in South Africa. The paper offers a substantive theory of collaborative multidisciplinary community development by drawing on multiple case studies and data sources. **Dithlake's** findings suggest that practitioners in the community development field are working in isolation. Thus, there is a need for a substantive theory that informs the multidisciplinary community development process of collaboration and partnership at the community level.

Recovery from the effects of the pandemic draws heavily on the government's ability to deliver essential services. In South Africa, efficient, effective and responsive delivery of basic services and education has always been a yardstick of good governance and post-1994 developments. **Zondi and Qwabe** report on a study which aimed to explore how rural infrastructure development affects the quality of education in rural schools using a local municipality as a case study. Their findings suggest that the delivery of quality education within Umzumbe Local Municipality is limited by infrastructural inadequacy, poor institutional capacity and limited revenue, which limit improvement and expansion. **Zondi and Qwabe** conclude by advancing policy directives to counteract the situation, including enhancing rural transport infrastructure.

In conclusion, there is widespread agreement among politicians, academics, and practitioners regarding the devastations and numerous difficulties that the COVID-19 epidemic caused. Everyone agrees that we have learned valuable lessons about improving our ability to withstand and recover from pandemics. Further, as a society, we are in a stronger position to endure pandemics and calamities in the future. We hope that as a continent, we can continue to create efficient institutions and procedures. Fundamentally good governance and ethical leadership ought to be pursued without compromise.

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