



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

Recommendations and reflections

Altaf, A.; Tsikata, D.; Torvikey, G.D.; Dekker, M.

Citation

Altaf, A., Tsikata, D., Torvikey, G. D., & Dekker, M. (2024). Recommendations and reflections. In *Equity in COVID-19* (pp. 365-369). London: Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4178578>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4178578>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



Recommendations and Reflections

*Anika Altaf, Dzodzi Tsikata, Gertrude Dzifa Torvikey,
and Marleen Dekker*

EQUITY FOR FUTURE PREPAREDNESS: LEARNING FROM THE POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION GAPS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN AFRICA

Many insightful and valuable recommendations and reflections can be derived from the case studies presented in this book. The unique focus of the case studies on equity within policies and programming at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has unveiled serious (future) implications for exacerbating structural inequalities. The health effects of COVID-19 have been limited in Africa; however, the socio-economic consequences of mitigation measures have been substantial. Although the pandemic itself

A. Altaf (✉)

INCLUDE Knowledge Platform for Inclusive Development Policies, African Studies Centre Leiden, Leiden, The Netherlands

e-mail: a.altaf@asc.leidenuniv.nl

D. Tsikata

Department of Development Studies, SOAS, University of London, London, UK

e-mail: dt48@soas.ac.uk

is no longer considered a global threat, the aftermath for the African continent unequivocally is. While some of the studies suggested ways to alleviate part of the harmful remnants of COVID-19, lessons that can be drawn are predominantly warnings for future disruptive changes and crises. During COVID-19, the vision of “*building back better*” was heard loudly within and outside of the development realm. Yet getting back to business as usual quickly overshadowed this aspiration.

Missing Data and Single Registries

If preparedness for future shocks and threats is not commenced soon, slogans such as “*building back better*” will once again remain slogans in a next crisis. For Africa, one of the major constraints in reaching equity and targeting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups with COVID-19 policies and programming was a lack of data and systems. Governments, even with the best intentions of reaching the poorest, generally failed to do so due to outdated population data. Those who required support of the government were not on their radar, despite the fact that they carried the heaviest burden as a result of the containment measures. Moreover, existing data sources were found to be applying systems of patronage (Tsikata & Torvikey, 2022). Countries that had data systems such as single registries in place, e.g. Kenya, Senegal and Mauritius or Togo, where voter registration information and other means to reach a broader population were used, were able to quickly put these to use and scale-up (Swinkels & Altaf, 2022). These types of data were crucial in rolling-out social policies. Especially the single registry system functions well, it is a system that ideally includes all programmes supported by the government, making coordination between social policies possible, such as education, taxes, health care, agricultural livelihoods programmes and other social

G. D. Torvikey

Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

M. Dekker

African Studies Centre Leiden, Leiden, The Netherlands

e-mail: m.dekker@asc.leidenuniv.nl

programmes (Swinkels & Altaf, 2022). Single registries could also function to formalize informal work in order to mitigate the impact of loss of work, which was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic for example during the lock-downs. At the same time, those working in the informal sector may want to stay off the radar. It is crucial that single registries do not cause harm to those who need to be protected, e.g. through misuse of data by governments. Moreover, for single registries to function well, the quality of data and coverage requirements make it a costly affair. Political will and sufficient funding are essential for successful single registries. Global or bilateral funds could play an important role in the set-up of national single registries.

The Shift of Power

While there is no justification for hoarding vaccines and patents, a positive side-effect of these and other exclusionary processes of the global North during the pandemic have pushed the acceleration of the consciousness on the African continent to speeding-up self-reliance (further decreasing dependance on primary commodities), decolonization and regional cooperation and continental unification (e.g., African Union, African Continental Free Trade Agreement). The pandemic offered room to rethink neoliberal development models that had reached their finest hour even before COVID-19. Moreover, possibilities to invest in, develop and promote indigenous and homegrown innovations, research and development sprung up (Kanu, 2020). The global north can learn from the innovations and developments in Africa during the pandemic, for example, the way the private sector in some African countries, such as Ghana, rose to the occasion (e.g., by providing health facilities). This is in stark contrast to for example large companies in the Netherlands profiting from the pandemic while many citizens were in a precarious situation.

Despite the determinedness of African countries to pursue their vision of an independent continent, the global community has a responsibility not to impede these developments, e.g. through the mounting debts crisis and subsidies of countries in the North creating unfair competition within African markets. However “simply” restructuring debts will not be enough, debts and subsidies are part of a financial system based on power imbalances. These imbalances have been magnified during COVID and other events the past years creating a sense of unfairness amongst African countries and a push back on the current system facilitating these

imbalances. Hence, the global community has an important task to tackle the inequity within the (financial) system to sustainably address the debt issues and create a level playing field for African countries. Supporting a power balance voluntary will benefit both African countries and the global community, instead of a more forceful and perhaps resentful push from the African continent to restoring balance.

Knowledge Gaps

We already know that inequalities have exacerbated as a consequence of the pandemic and the measures following from that. These measures were developed for the short-term and with the idea that the harm caused by the pandemic would be easily reversible. Thus policies and programming to address structural inequalities are not in place. Moreover, the mid- and long-term consequences of the pandemic are yet to come to light. School closures and related to that drop-out, loss of income and employment of those working in the formal, but particularly informal sector, the impact on political stressors, such as postponement of elections, the role of civil society and civic space, whether and how innovations initiated during the pandemic can be leveraged are some aspects that require further digging.

Using INCLUDE's Equity Lens to Leave No One Behind

The concept of equity, focusing on social and spatial aspects, and the central question in INCLUDE's approach to equity: who gets what, when, where and why, have been crucial in exposing several biases such as gender (more job loss and other disruptions to livelihoods amongst women), as well as a rural and informal economies' bias, revealing poor targeting and implementation of COVID-19 policies and programmes in the case studies. Answering those central questions gives insights into the types of tailor made policies that are necessary to reach the different vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the context of COVID-19, but also applicable in other crisis and non-crisis contexts. These questions can however only be answered if those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged are heard, directly or through representation. The case studies showed the importance of representation in the design, planning and governance of policy responses (Tsikata & Torvikey, 2022). Trade unions and civil society organizations played a major role in some of the case studies both

in representing and in reaching vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, for example, in Ghana and Mozambique.

The intention to do better and not fall back into the way things were is not lost yet and not a utopia either. But it means that in order to do better next time, we start today with a genuine willingness to know who lives in poverty, who lives in a precarious situation and who could potentially fall into such a situation and listen to them. Only then can we safeguard equity in policies and programming and leave no one behind.

REFERENCES

- Kanu, I. A. (2020). Covid-19 and the economy: An African perspective. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 3(2), 29–39.
- Swinkels, C., & Altaf, A. (2022). Single and ready to mingle: Single registries in social protection. INCLUDE.
- Tsikata, D., & Torvikey, D. G. (2022). COVID-19 in Africa: A synthesis of 12 country studies. INCLUDE.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

