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International Relations Newsletter

Issue
15



Metro can no longer work in silos	1
Collective learning and joint advocacy critical for better Covid-19 recovery	} 2
Financing Joburg’s climate transition	
Covid-19’s impact on municipal finance	3
The future of work post Covid-19.....	4
Governance insights for better emergency response in metros	8
International partnership key to bolstering response in metros	9
Gauteng leverage diplomatic relations to combat the spread of Covid-19	10
Q&A with Professor Tshildz Marwala, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Johannesburg (UJ)	12
Post-Covid-19 scenarios.....	14
Amid change, an endurance partnership will remain: US envoy to SA.....	15
SA’s Covid-19 vaccine trials hold key lessons for future partnerships.....	16
Virtual diplomacy is here to stay post Covid-19	17
Africa is no island, cooperation crucial in fight against global pandemic.....	18
Collaborative investment needed to support women’s recovery from Covid-19	19
Barbados prime minister calls for global cooperation	21
Joburg clinches top accolade for Covid-19 library innovation.....	22



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Dear Readers,

Our 15th edition has been themed “international partnerships that enhance service delivery during and post the Covid-19 pandemic”.

The year 2020 gripped all stakeholders around the globe with uncertainty, as all sectors of life, society and professional careers strove to reinvent themselves in the face of Covid-19.

The hotly debated question, which spilt over to 2021, has been “How can Governments, Cities, companies and employees reinvent themselves and reclaim their relevance amid the Covid-19 pandemic?”

The 15th edition also focuses on how holistic synergies at an international level can serve South Africa’s national, provincial and municipal governments.

This edition reflects on and recalibrates the impact of Covid-19 on the City’s international relations, to re-imagine a path to connect and collaborate globally. Enjoy the read.

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We hope you enjoy the read!

Metros can no longer work in silos



Metropolitan areas across the world can no longer work in silos to address service delivery and governance issues, says Octavi de la Varga, the Secretary-General of Metropolis, a global network of major cities and metros.

De la Varga says although the world is experiencing the complexities of managing metropolitan areas, it's important for Metropolis as a global network to systemise and capitalise on all the knowledge created in metro cities.

Metropolis Africa Regional Secretary, Sithole Mbanga urges cities on the continent to push for the decentralisation of power.

"For the African economy to thrive, Africa needs strong cities that have power, functions and resources for them to put the requisite infrastructure that drives the economy," says Mbanga.

Nalini Naicker from the Office of the Gauteng Premier notes that Metropolis should serve as a knowledge-sharing hub and platform for metropolises to connect, share experiences, and mobilise on a wide range of local and global issues.

Collective learning and joint advocacy critical for better Covid-19 recovery

For a year now, local governments have been at the forefront of the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and have worked to curb socioeconomic inequalities. This pandemic has magnified the shortcomings we're already aware of and has spelt out a simple truth that needs to be said out loud. We can no longer ignore the persistence of inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion in our cities and territories.

Local and regional governments worked hard to ensure the continuity of the provision of public services during the lockdown to support efforts to address the global health emergency, whether they had the powers and the mandate or not. They have been providing shelter for people who could not self-isolate, tools for students to study at home, food for those who lost their jobs during the outbreak and have ensured children that couldn't go to school receive food baskets. They have been doing their jobs in a very complex context.

As United Cities and Local Governments, we have accompanied local and regional governments throughout the lockdown through our Live Learning Experiences (LLE) initiative, launched in partnership with UN-Habitat and Metropolis. LLEs allow local and regional governments to collaborate with ideas, resources, and knowledge to respond to the immediate needs of urban citizens and also to re-imagine the cities we want to build after the crisis.

Live Learning Experiences have themselves become the key to our advocacy, with lessons shared being the key to develop our **Decalogue for the COVID-19 era**:

10 key recommendations for a context of unprecedented and universal challenges. Building on the solidarity put on display by local and regional governments, a true beacon of security, our Decalogue underpins strong local service provision as the cornerstone of the sanitary response, and essential for the aftermath of Covid-19.

Caring for frontline workers, ensuring culture is seen as an antidote for Covid-19 recovery, addressing inequalities that the pandemic has exacerbated – including gender bias and the growing unequal access to public services – will be critical to building the future that our communities need. This needs to be done by including our communities in decision-making processes, truly transforming how the global table looks and who sits on it.

The challenge is, where do we go next? How do we ensure the needs of our communities are brought to life? The Live Learning Experiences campaign has shown us that sharing among ourselves has led the way, but our advocacy needs to go even beyond local and regional governments.

These experiences are set to become a part of the **Pact for the Future** of humanity that UCLG has been mandated to develop: a **Pact** that includes all spheres of government, partners from the civil society, and all stakeholders, to transform how we relate with each other, with our environment, and with our institutions. A pact, in short, for the people, for the planet, and government, to come out of this pandemic as better humanity.

Written by: Emilia Saiz, UCLG Secretary-General

Financing Joburg's climate transition

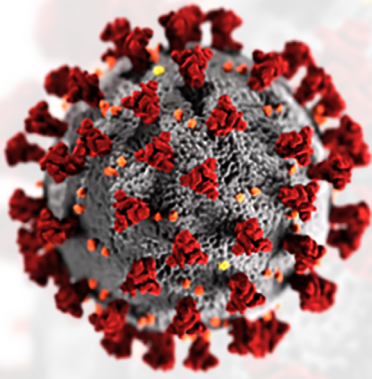
The Executive Mayor, Cllr Geoff Makhubo says the City has developed specific instruments and partnerships to finance climate adaptation and mitigation strategies and to pioneer a green and Smart City approach to its citizenry. Cllr Makhubo was speaking to FMDV, the international network of local

governments. His interview was one of the first contributions to the Knowledge Finance Hub that FMDV has launched in March, offering a unique platform to learn and understand municipal finance through solutions and experiences shared by practitioners.



See interview on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5raddKG-8_Y&feature=emb_logo

Covid-19's impact on municipal finance



The crucial role of local and regional governments around the world in delivering essential public services to their population has been highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the face of the current crisis, local and regional governments are required to introduce a set of prevention and containment measures to curb the spread of the virus and are often compelled to take exceptional measures for their communities, in addition to delivering on their mandate.

The impact of such measures on local and regional government finance is twofold. First, reduced local economic activity and use of public services' decreases local and regional government's revenue, which consists mainly of taxes (including property and business taxes) and user fees. Secondly, local and regional governments have to incur exceptional expenditure to support local economies and households' incomes, raise community awareness, strengthen social and health protection and ensure public safety and the overall continuity of public services.

This "scissor effect" (additional expenditure vs reduced revenue) puts additional pressure on already strained budgets in several regions, which in turn impacts the capacity to tackle the pandemic. The Covid-19 crisis has intensified the need to strengthen financing available to local and regional governments.

- **FMDV supports local governments in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate**

To support local governments facing such an unprecedented crisis, FMDV, the global network dedicated to promoting and developing solutions to finance and invest in sustainable urban development, is developing a range of solutions and

services for its partners, through different approaches:

- **Technical assistance and strategic support to help national and local governments mobilise resources** in the long term for a *just urban transition* and allow them to provide appropriate services and infrastructure to their populations. FMDV helps central governments define national policies and develop financial instruments to better finance and invest in local development. In addition, FMDV also supports local governments in structuring the most suitable strategies to attract donors and investors for their projects.

- **Capacity building and knowledge dissemination on local finance** through training, coaching, and peer to peer exchanges as well as workshops. FMDV brings professionals and practitioners on urban finance to share expertise with local governments to reinforce their capacity to finance service delivery and infrastructure. Through its pool of partners, FMDV can cover the main sectors of local finance such as taxes, climate finance, private investment, land-based finance, affordable housing, water, energy efficiency, waste management, transport, nature-based solutions, etc.

- **Advocacy:** FMDV contributes to the international dialogue on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate led by the United Nations to propose concrete solutions to finance their implementation at a local level. FMDV has successfully contributed to integrating a large range of financial solutions that are now recognised by the international community. FMDV also supports United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the global network of local and regional governments to implement its strategy on localising finance.

FMDV has worked with more than 1,500 local governments from 100 countries and has contributed to mobilising 1 billion USD for local action. FMDV operates in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa, including South Africa.

The City of Joburg has played a strong leadership role as an FMDV co-President since 2014 and has collaborated on diverse topics, including private investment, climate finance, transport, housing, and energy efficiency.



The Future of Work post Covid-19

African local governments have an opportunity to make decent work a reality for the continent's youth, developing skills, technological pathways and productivity for a brighter future, transforming Africa's informal and rural economy for decent work, and respecting international labour standards, promoting social dialogue and ensuring gender equality, writes Dr Joni Musabayana, the Regional Director for Africa in the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

What is the role of the ILO in ensuring that African local governments adopt the "future of work" principle?

The Future of Work calls for a human-centred agenda, that places people and the work they do at the centre of economic, social policy and business practice. One of the pillars focuses on increasing investment in the institutions of work. From regulations and employment contracts to collective agreements and labour inspection systems. These are the building blocks of societies that forge pathways to secure a future of work with dignity, economic security and equality.

The Abidjan Declaration can be adopted by local governments as it has the following principles:

1. Making decent work a reality for Africa's youth, developing skills, technological pathways and productivity for a brighter future; transforming Africa's informal and rural economy for decent work, and respecting international labour standards, promoting social dialogue and ensuring gender equality.

1. Strengthening the capacities of all people to benefit from the opportunities of a changing world of work through:

- Supporting the role of the private sector as a principal source of economic growth and job creation by promoting an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and sustainable enterprises, in

particular, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as cooperatives and the social and solidarity economy, to generate decent work, productive employment and improved living standards for all

- Supporting the role of the public sector as a significant employer and provider of quality public services;
 - Creating decent work and productive employment for all, with emphasis on youth, women, persons with disabilities and other groups vulnerable to discrimination;
 - Promoting entrepreneurship;
 - Ensuring freedom to innovate and experiment, as well as voice representation and rights for youth and
 - Promoting, where appropriate, cross-border social dialogue to foster decent work, including for vulnerable workers in global supply chains.
3. Promoting inclusive and sustainable economic development and growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, through:
- Facilitating the promotion of structural transformation with an emphasis on agriculture and rural economies and food security;
 - Enhancing productivity;
 - Improving working conditions, occupational safety and health;
 - Improving the environment for sustainable enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises;
 - Promoting cooperatives and the social and solidarity economy; and
 - Promoting growth towards a green economy and just transition

How is the ILO assisting African local governments to reverse Covid-19 related unemployment?

National employment policies can play a key role in linking the immediate response to the Covid-19 crisis and achieving an inclusive, job-rich recovery. This requires adapting policy processes to address three key areas at local government:

- Local governments need to practise policy sequencing, balancing health and employment objectives across a range of policy domains. This includes macroeconomic policies; sectoral strategies and business support; social protection and income support; labour market institutions; and skills development.
 - Target hard-hit sectors (e.g. retail, accommodation) and groups (e.g. women, young people and others, such as persons with disabilities), especially those in the informal economy, during the reactivation and recovery phases through general and specific policy measures, while identifying opportunities in new sectors with employment potential.
3. Intense response by local government to the heightened uncertainty through strengthened data collection, assessments and analytical approaches; more responsive policy processes; and social dialogue with employer and worker organisations.

Looking beyond the recovery phase, national employment policy processes also need to consider the longer-term implications of the Covid-19 crisis. In many ways, the current crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities (e.g. faced by specific groups, such as women) and accelerated trends that were already impacting the labour market (for instance, digitalisation). In this context, the formalisation of enterprises and workers in line with Recommendation No.

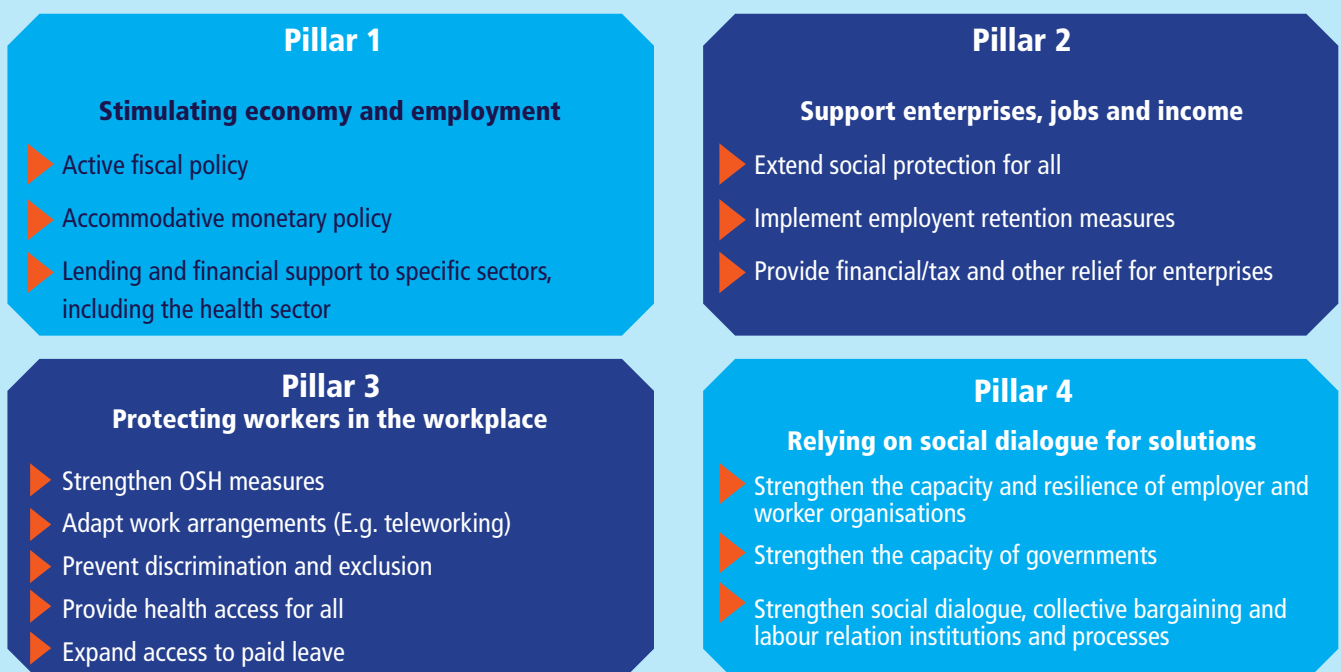
204 will help reinforce efforts to reduce inequalities and strengthen resilience in the labour market.

A focus on employment, including self-employment, is fundamental to facilitate the recovery process. Past responses to health emergencies and natural disasters have shown that employment-intensive investments in health and water, sanitation, and hygiene, infrastructure and services are an important means of immediate job creation in crises. Policies that support skills development and entrepreneurship cushion the impact of unemployment.

Longer-term, large public investments are needed to boost employment and crowd in private investment. Governments could accelerate economic growth and boost employment with measures such as employment-intensive public investment, government procurement that provides' preferences to small businesses, and tax incentives to stimulate local sourcing of larger firms.

Employment retention schemes, including short-time work arrangements/partial unemployment benefits and other time, bound support for enterprises, such as wage subsidies, provision of paid leave and extension of existing entitlements to workers, training leave, grants and related schemes. Time-bound financial/ tax relief and income smoothing measures to support business continuity especially, SMEs and those who are self-employed.

Figure 1. Policy framework: Four key pillars to fight Covid-19 according to International Labour Standards



Which best practices can African local governments adopt from their international counterparts?

Maintaining people's job-readiness has been an important dimension of Public Employment Services during the pandemic. Employability-oriented services deal with the ability to search for jobs, update a résumé, and locate and understand labour market information. Another important dimension of maintaining people's job readiness is fostering the ability to update and refresh competencies and skills to perform tasks in a job, which will be more relevant in the post-coronavirus context.

According to global estimates, a third of the skills deemed essential in today's job market have changed in the last five years (WEF, 2016). This process is likely to accelerate owing to the effects of Covid-19. Some countries have reinforced support for target groups in need of improving and/or acquiring digital skills to keep themselves afloat in the job market.

- Singapore launched a special support grant for low and middle-income unemployed workers affected by the Covid-19 crisis. The grant is linked to job-searching support and training by the national training provider, Workforce Singapore, or the Employment and Employability Institute, delivered through virtual classrooms and e-learning) (Government of Singapore, 2020).
- The Government of Australia is allocating additional funding for jobseekers aged 45 and above to increase access to training and job-search support, improve digital literacy and identify transferable skills (ILO, 2020c).
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Russia announced special subsidies for people at risk of dismissal and part-time workers, as well as providing access to advanced vocational training or apprenticeship/internship programmes (ILO, 2020c).

Unprecedented labour market disruptions require timely and large-scale support for enterprises and workers around the world. The ILO calls for urgent and immediate policy responses to actively support transitions into decent work and prevent a significant drop in labour market participation.

Which economic sectors should African local governments develop and transform post-Covid-19?

Workers and enterprises in the informal economy are the most vulnerable. About 2 billion people worldwide work in the informal economy, in jobs that are characterised by a lack of basic protection, including social protection. They often have poor access to health-care services and have no income replacement in case of sickness or lockdown. Many of them cannot work remotely. Staying home means losing their jobs, and without wages, they cannot eat. Close to 1.1 billion informal economy workers live and work in countries in full lockdown and an additional 304 million in countries in partial lockdown. These workers together represent 67 percent of informal employment.

Employees are considered informally employed if their employer does not contribute to social security on their behalf or if they do not benefit from paid annual leave or sick leave. Employers and own-account workers are in informal employment if they run enterprises (or economic units) in the informal sector (non-incorporated private enterprises) without a formal bookkeeping system or not registered with relevant national authorities. Almost all these workers (over 95 percent) are working in units of fewer than 10. Among informal economy workers significantly impacted by the crisis, women are over-represented in high-risk sectors: 42 percent of women workers are working in those sectors, compared to 32 percent of men.

Support to businesses and jobs need to target the most vulnerable to mitigate the economic and social consequences of the confinement period. Given the vulnerability of small enterprises and workers in the informal economy, governments should explore all options to finance measures that support firms and their workers and provide adequate social protection. Substantial numbers of own-account-workers, small businesses, and people in the informal economy are highly vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic in developing countries.

Tailored responses are needed to reach and support small businesses, through combined measures of direct financial support and loan guarantees to avoid saddling firms with too much debt (but conditional on retaining workers). Preparedness to identify and expand financial resources is therefore essential to deal with the high demand for lines of credit.

For small businesses, microfinance and semi-formal financial institutions can constitute an effective means of reaching enterprises and own-account workers operating in the informal economy. Income support for workers and enterprises operating in the informal economy is critical to prevent them from plunging far deeper into poverty. As there is little time to design new schemes, successful programmes should be prioritised and scaled up, such as cash transfers, child allowances and programmes used for shelter and food relief. In many cases, conditional and unconditional cash transfers may be needed for an extended period. Income support for poor workers and households is vital for firms, especially those that produce consumer goods.

In the reactivation phase, policies should target the provision of timely information about the status of containment measures and exit strategies. Exit from containment should take advantage of social dialogue to ensure that reopening of workplaces occurs with safeguards for the safety of workers and consumers. Many sectors will require governments to coordinate the distribution of essential inputs to firms and provide support to reprogramming production towards the health sector and essential products and services.

Wholesale, Retail, Manufacturing and Tourism industries are also affected. More than half of these enterprises, some 232 million are in wholesale and retail trade. Own-account workers represent 45 percent of all employment in this sector, while micro firms (between two and nine employees) account for 25 percent of all workers in it. A further 111 million enterprises in manufacturing, 51 million in accommodation and food services and 42 million in real estate and other business activities are currently facing an extraordinarily difficult business environment with major impacts on employment opportunities.

Taken together, these four sectors account for more than 30 percent of GDP on average. Own-account workers and micro-enterprises represent around 70 percent of global employment in retail trade and nearly 60 percent in the accommodation and food services sector, a reflection of the severe vulnerability of these sectors in the current economic crisis. While small enterprises around the globe play a major role as providers of jobs, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, they often lack access to credit, have few assets and are the least likely to benefit

from fiscal measures in general and the stimulus packages related to the current crisis. As witnessed in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the number of small businesses in advanced economies is expected to decline due to widespread business failures in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, it will take considerable time to bring back investment and business operations as recovery is likely to be slow.

Job-rich recovery will lay the foundation for inclusive and sustainable growth. The impact of the pandemic is likely to be uneven, adding significantly to existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. In the recovery phase, greater attention should be paid to the strengthening of employment policies to support enterprises and workers, along with strong labour market institutions and comprehensive and well-resourced social protection systems, including care policies and infrastructure, that kick in automatically and inclusively as crises occur.



Governance insights for better emergency

response in metros

Better access to urban spaces is key for equitable and healthier urban communities. The current global health, social and economic crisis has brought to light the need to respond to a more pressing challenge. The accessibility crisis. Our urban communities, and particularly vulnerable groups, have been lacking access to adequate housing, public and green spaces, services and infrastructure. Not to mention access to opportunities. What's striking is that all of these issues have been demonstrated to be critical in the Covid-19 crisis, especially for women, migrant populations, and people with disabilities, essential workers and homeless persons.

In other words, there are strong correlations between people's capacity to withstand crises and accessibility concerns. Many of these areas are competences of local, metropolitan and regional governments. So, what can subnational governments do? In the current context, upgrading their governance structures to truly find solutions to these challenges and respond to people's needs' seems the best solution.

To support local and regional governments' efforts, Metropolis, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and LSE Cities joined forces in mid-2020 to launch the Emergency Governance Initiative for Cities and Regions (EGI). The initiative analyses the impact of the health crisis and its governance implications at the local level and provides insights on how to build greater institutional capacity to respond to future emergencies. This initiative builds on lessons learned and good practices shared in the platform Cities for Global Health and the Live Learning Experience Hub.

How can governments ensure accessibility and service delivery during a crisis? First of all, crisis management needs more effective governance systems. To unlock opportunities for an inclusive economy and avoid social and economic instability, all levels of government need to change their governance approach towards a more collaborative model. Therefore, understanding social problems, like gender inequality, as emergencies allows us to move from gradual and long-term processes to radical action. Secondly, innovation and data management are

key tools in emergency response. Many local and regional governments have used innovation to protect people's wellbeing and ensure access to services and opportunities. For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic, many subnational governments adapted existing tech structures to develop contact tracing systems and brought together a wide range of stakeholders to co-create solutions that were aligned to citizen's needs.

Thirdly, local financial stability and independence are at the heart of prevention, mitigation and adaptation. The Covid-19 crisis has underlined the limitations of the financial architecture of subnational governments, particularly around their capacity to generate resources, invest in long-term services and infrastructure and access credit and capital markets. These limitations have put more pressure on local and metropolitan budgets in the short-term response to the pandemic and the long-term recovery strategy.

Lastly, there is power in numbers. This crisis has demonstrated that cooperation between metros from around the world can help us turn turmoil into opportunities.

Metropolis is committed to inspiring governments from all over the world to take bold action to create more inclusive, healthy and sustainable urban spaces. Through a call to rethink our metropolitan spaces, Metropolis has opened a dialogue with experts, local and regional governments and international organisations to reimagine the future of our cities and metropolitan spaces.

All of these examples are key ingredients for better service delivery and improved accessibility for our urban communities in emergency contexts. Yet there is much more to be said and done.

- Do you want to rethink the future of metropolitan areas? Join the conversation & watch our MetroTalks series
- Do you want to get inspired? Check out cities' responses and our recommendations
- Do you want to know more? Contact Laura Valdés, Research & Communications Officer, Metropolis

International partnerships key to bolstering Africa's Covid-19 response



If there ever was a time for full-scale global solidarity and cooperation to fight for health rights, that time is now because no one country would ever be able to prevent or fully control the Covid-19 pandemic on its own. We are faced with an unprecedented situation brought about by the emergence and rapid spread of Covid-19, the biggest public health emergency of our time.

Indeed, Covid-19 has triggered a humanitarian and socio-economic crisis that is already devastating societies and reversing vital gains made in human development. The magnitude of the crisis is becoming clearer with every day passing. It could have a massive impact on peace and security, development, human rights but, above all on the lives and livelihoods of ordinary people, particularly the poor and the most vulnerable, who struggle to eke out a living in an already highly unequal world.

Unfortunately, the hard reality is that many lives will be lost before the pandemic is brought under control and its wider ramifications will be felt for years to come. Its immediate and long-term impact on the developing world is expected to be massive. And, given Africa's acute vulnerabilities, without aggressive and concerted intervention, the human toll of the crisis on the continent, and its socio-economic ramifications, could be unfathomable. Unless global solidarity is extended, Africa will once again be left behind.

Since the pandemic started, most countries have focused, understandably, on protecting their nationals. However, it has become clear that fighting the disease only within one's borders will not be effective in combating a pandemic that, by its very nature, is global. International support and solidarity are required to beat Covid-19.

African countries have shown leadership individually and collectively. The African Union has established an Africa Taskforce for Coronavirus (AFTCOR) to develop a unified continent-wide strategy — and sectoral strategies to combat the virus and its impact are being developed. African Member States are taking several measures to

Africa lacks the financial resources, the infrastructure and the human capacity to mount an effective and comprehensive response matching the scale of the problem. Over \$200 billion will be needed to implement the Africa-CDC preparedness strategy. Additional resources will be needed to tackle the direct and indirect non-health consequences of this crisis. The UN and the African Union are coming together to overcome this challenge. The Secretary-General has called on G20 leaders to adopt a stimulus package for developing countries. A humanitarian appeal for US\$ 2 billion has been launched.

An African AntiCovid-19 Fund has been established by the Bureau of the Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government. Calls for debt cancellation and suspension have been made. And some support from the international community and private donors has started to arrive. But, again, more will be needed. Let us not forget that ultimately it is about saving lives and livelihoods. In the short term, efforts will have to concentrate on stopping the Covid-19 pandemic and strengthening social protection and safety nets to tackle its immediate effects.

Poverty and inequality are a reality that leaves many people destitute on the continent. The most vulnerable segments of the population will fall victim to the virus and therefore require urgent support. Social isolation and the washing of hands are amongst the most important measures but are not easy for people who live in overcrowded homes and neighbourhoods, without water and sanitation, living from hand to mouth. This puts additional strain on the capacity of African governments. As argued, the virus has brought into sharp focus, the level of inequalities that exist in the world, while it does not discriminate but attacks everyone in its path. We will also need to lay the foundations for a strong post-Covid-19 recovery in the medium and long-term. The Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 are a clear way forward.

When the UN General Assembly launched the Decade of Action last September to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, it warned us that the world was lagging. Unfortunately, we are now witnessing the consequences. Strong health systems, good nutrition and clean air are basic instruments to fight Covid-19 and pneumonia. The world needs to take action and realise that sustainable and inclusive development is the best way to prevent a future pandemic. As the Secretary-General said, "if done right, we can steer the recovery toward a more sustainable and inclusive path".

Let us not lose this opportunity. We can do it. We just need to work together. As an African proverb says, "you need all the fingers to pick up the flour". Let us all fight to defeat this virus in Africa and the world. We are not too late. Figures show that the virus is spreading across Africa. If the world reacts swiftly, if support for Africa scales up, we are on time to stop its expansion. It is in the interest of the entire world to do so; this is a virus that knows no borders.

We plead with all African actors locked in conflict to respond, with immediate action, to Secretary-General

António Guterres' call for a global ceasefire. Some have already accepted the call. The momentum is growing. There is no greater adversary to all humanity today than Covid-19, which is devastating us indiscriminately, an adversary that is blind to all the differences that divide us.

On our side, the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) will continue to support the Secretary-General's efforts to foster a coherent and coordinated response of the UN System in its support of Africa and to step up global advocacy against Covid-19. This is the way to achieve the Africa we want and to ensure that we leave no one behind.

Written by: Bience Gawanas, Special Adviser on Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General

Gauteng leverages diplomatic relations to combat the spread of Covid-19

Covid-19, the pandemic that swept across the world from September 2019 would serve to entrench human relations that we had taken for granted. From the idle hug to the meeting over coffee, the virus would teach us not to underestimate the relations and partnerships we had fostered over time.

Relations with international partners have been a core area of work for the Gauteng City-Region since it decided to embark on a path to develop the space into a globally competitive city region in early 2000.

Whilst these partnerships were designed to encourage development in the city region, the strength of these relations would be tested during Covid-19.

From early 2020, Gauteng would realise the value of the partnerships that it had established with countries across the globe – from Asia to America, Czechoslovakia to Cuba – these partners stepped forward to aid Gauteng in its fight against the virus, donating personal protective equipment for healthcare workers, ventilators to save lives and other health-related support.

The broader Provincial International Relations programme, with sub-regional governments, was put in abeyance due to the need to mitigate strategic risks posed by the global pandemic.

Diplomatic relations were leveraged to help combat the spread of the coronavirus:

Country, Embassy Or	Donation Type
French Embassy	PEUGEOUT CARS - USAGE
United States Embassy	VENTILATORS
Czech Republic	MEDICAL EQUIPMENT
Bank Of China	PPE
Government Of Lithuania	PPE
UNDP	PPE
French Embassy	PPE
China	PPE

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Diplomatic relations were leveraged to help combat the spread of the coronavirus:

International partnerships would also serve to assist Gauteng in learning about the virus and entrenching this learning in practice to ensure focused combat of the disease. The World Health Organisation (WHO) ensured personnel were deployed to the Gauteng Covid-19 Command Centre daily, focusing its assistance on contact tracing and clinical care.

Research partners worked with the Provincial Government, providing advice, research and assistance on the establishment of data dashboards, lessons on management of the virus, benchmarking for preparation for the surges and the development of vaccines.

As Gauteng rolls out its vaccine programme to contain the devastating pandemic, there are critical lessons for strategic partnerships and international relation initiatives with Cities and sub-regions:

- Fighting the pandemic and ensuring sustainable livelihoods can only be improved through effective and sound governance with Cities and sub-regional governance
- Investment to ensure manufacturing capacity of vaccines and roll out also requires capacities and capabilities with the role and contribution of cities, sub-regional government and communities

A joined approach will ensure we defeat the long-lasting impact of the pandemic.

The Gauteng International Relations Programme is anchored on the need to promote developmental opportunities per regions globally: Africa, Europe, the Americas (North and South America), Asia and the Middle East; Oceania, etc.

This includes working with sub-regions and cities in partnership with social groups and the private sector to support the development of the Province, and contribute to the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AcFTA) and all its facets, also through continental development corridors.

Written by: Nalini Naicker and Michael Canham

Q&A with Professor Tshilidzi Marwala, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Johannesburg (UJ)



The emergence of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2 / COVID-19) in 2019 may be the most consequential event of the early 21st century, upending modern life, globalisation, and relations between countries. The outbreak of Covid-19 is a health crisis, with approximately 3 million cases and over 200 000 deaths and counting. It is also an economic one, with the various stay-at-home ordinances and travel restrictions imposed to break the chain of transmission leading to dramatically diminished economic activity, massive unemployment, and income losses around the world.

What can we learn from theories of international relations about why the response has thus far been so ineffective?

We saw the impact of the various responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in Australia and New Zealand, where the leadership response was measured, cases dropped to almost nothing. In the US, where any semblance of leadership was arguably absent, cases soared. South Africa presented an intriguing mix of leadership elements. On the one hand, the swift and strict response to Covid-19 was initially quite effective in controlling cases but came at a significant cost to the economy.

On the other hand, corrupt elements in the government in the months that followed all but undone the initial response. As the pandemic spread, it became clear that there would not be a homogenous global response. Already, we were battling China's fight back against sharing accurate information and allowing World Health Organisation (WHO) experts into the country as well as US politics playing out into the organisation. What must be taken into account is that amidst this turbulent backdrop, states do not have the same capabilities. Though cooperation generally works in the context of a health crisis, we were faced with polarising forces.

For instance, in the US, there was initially great denial about the pandemic. We did not see the same phenomenon as we did during the Cold War when the Soviet Union and the US cooperated to eradicate smallpox. We have also seen how some states have prioritised their gains. This has been particularly stark with regards to the vaccine rollout. According to a New York Times analysis, the European Union could inoculate its residents twice, Britain and the United States could do so four times over, and Canada six times over. In contrast, many poorer nations were only expected to be able to vaccinate at most 20% of their populations this year.

How can ICT components be used as enablers in designing cities to be smarter and more sustainable, offering a better quality of life through environmentally friendly and viable solutions while preparing Cities to be ready for the Fourth Industrial Revolution?

Cities around the globe are facing unprecedented urbanisation, which is expected to reach around 65% to 75% of the total world's population by 2050 (UN, 2014). The latter sets off the wave for the revitalisation and expansion of existing cities and the development and creation of new ones. To meet this, cities need a new operating paradigm that can provide the solutions required by urban residents. These solutions should be economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and socially inclusive. The concept of Smart and Sustainable City (SSC) emerged recently as a solution for various current urban problems to improve the quality of life of citizens and enhance sustainability issues in cities. Around the world, smart cities and local governments are leveraging this technology in many ways. Of course, challenges vary with context. Singapore and Dubai stand out as examples of successful smart cities.

We've seen how analysis based on algorithms, one of the building blocks of AI, can help improve efficiency and objectivity.

Perhaps, the question should be, how does this translate into our context? It is important to identify the needs of our population and posit solutions that make sense. We need to look at the generation and delivery of energy, the extension and improvement of water infrastructure and health and educational infrastructure to create a coherent and comprehensive infrastructure network.

The first step would be for the government to develop a comprehensive set of infrastructure priorities for the country with achievable timelines.

In 2012, the government adopted the National Infrastructure Plan as a job creator and to strengthen the delivery of basic services. We've seen numerous cases of this being effective around the world. The challenge of healthcare, education, public transportation and water and sanitation have to be addressed at a local level to expand access. Unlike Singapore and Dubai, where the focus has been on simply the ease of service delivery online, in South Africa, we still have to get the service delivery aspect right. Global solutions that can be posited include incorporating Wi-Fi into public spaces, automated parking payments and even government service chatbots. However, we need to interrogate what each context requires.

The strengthening of the use of big technologies, especially, those related to Industry 4.0, has resulted in increased trust in ICT technologies as a tool to support the public health sector as well as to provide quick solutions to many governments, organisations, and people during the time of crisis – Is there a possibility of AI replacing diplomats in conducting Diplomacy and International Relations in the future?

Countries and Cities are experiencing an era characterised by a fusion of technologies that has resulted in the blurring of the boundaries and lines between the physical, digital, and biological worlds (WEF, 2016). It is a fusion of advances in data science, Artificial Intelligence (AI), drones, robotics, quantum computing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, the Internet of Things (IoT), 3D printing, and other technologies.

As I often point out, there is still a fundamental requirement for a human element. Although 4IR technology is an effective tool, it complements us. Diplomacy, after all, is a human-centred field. AI, of course, has already mastered

some skills of diplomats such as the ability to read body language, facial expressions and translate various languages. However, in its current form, AI cannot pick up on many nuances in negotiations. Of course, this is because we are now only exposed to narrow AI, which are systems able to perform specific tasks. However, more functions may be performed in the shift towards general AI, when systems can effectively replicate our intellectual capacity. The path to general AI, however, does not seem to be a linear one. Still, it is difficult to predict whether AI will master the soft skills of diplomacy. In a ted talk some years ago, the French Ambassador to Sweden, David Cvach said, reminiscent of robots, "the rules of modern diplomacy were designed to constrain emotions".

Negotiations require disimpassioned analysis. However, this does not encompass the entire role of diplomats. Diplomatic relations stretch far beyond negotiations – they also centre on forging relationships. Whether AI will evolve to master these soft skills remains to be seen and whether we will be prepared to completely forego the human element of diplomacy is doubtful.

Have African governments harnessed technology as a response to Covid-19 (Coronavirus) or do we still have much to learn from our international peers?

Many governments around the globe, especially those with a strong digital infrastructure have already started their development process towards transforming their cities into smart and sustainable ones and have used different types of 4IR technologies to reduce and control the outbreak of this disease. The latter include, but not limited to, Belgium, China, France, Germany, Honduras, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, South Korea, United Arab Emirates (UAE), United Kingdom (UK), and United States (US).

Artificial Intelligence (e.g. AI-based computer vision cameras) and drones have been used to monitor public areas to assess whether social distancing was being represented or not. Globally, cloud-based platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, and WebEx, have been used to make it easier for workers to work from home and students to complete their studies online.

Robots, drones, and self-driving cars have also been used to deliver meals and medicine to infected patients as well as medical supplies to health facilities.

Mobile money and visa cards allowed people and vendors to go cashless.

In turn, scientists use nanotechnologies and advanced materials to prepare and test possible future vaccines as well as to prepare new forms of personal protective equipment. These technologies are currently playing a critical role in rapid diagnostic, therapeutics.

The use of AI in combatting the coronavirus has ranged from robotic cleaners spraying disinfectant at segregated wards to AI voice assistants calling people to advice on home-quarantine and AI-powered infrared sensors that detect body temperatures on the foreheads of moving passengers. Autonomous robots (able to work nonstop for more than three hours) have replaced human cleaners, which has reduced infection rates. This has been particularly effective in China and South Korea where there has been a marked slowdown in infection rates in recent weeks.

We have not seen much of this in an African context, even with collaboration with the private sector. However, we have seen a prevalence of mobile tech solutions.

We have had to adapt our technological responses to our context – inclusive of our divides. At the start of the pandemic, our government deployed a WhatsApp chat service to provide information and updates about the virus. We also have the Covid-19 Alert SA app, which allows you to anonymously alert users near you that you have tested positive for the virus and provides information on the next steps to take if you have been in contact with someone who is positive. In Nigeria, Wellvis has created the online Covid-19 Triage Tool, which allows users to self-assess their coronavirus risk category.

Post-Covid-19 scenarios

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased humanitarian needs and complicated the delivery of humanitarian assistance. While the virus continues to spread, a significant change in humanitarian funding is underway – with some donors reducing funding levels, while others increase.

The pandemic has highlighted many of the ways in which the global humanitarian system has failed to reform and has illustrated the importance of local actors in the provision of assistance.

Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) scenarios post-Covid-19 consider three different ways in which the provision of humanitarian assistance might change over 2021:

1. Continuing adaptation of response mechanisms; existing power dynamics unchanged
2. Increased national influence; reframed international support and
3. Increased national control; severely reduced international influence and support.

Source: Assessment Capacities Project

Amid change, an enduring partnership will

remain: Us envoy to SA



As President Joe Biden took his historic oath of office in Washington, the US diplomatic presence here in South Africa underwent a parallel transition. I assumed responsibility for leading the US mission in South Africa temporarily.

There was no pomp and parades, no speeches or ceremonies, just a dry diplomatic note from the US Embassy to South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation. But these two events – President Biden's inauguration and my new responsibilities – were linked by a common thread: the transition of authority in a democratic system that played out in government offices across America and in US embassies around the world.

There has been unusual attention on the US transition this year. We had all become accustomed to a boring, bureaucratic process. Even as we have a spirited debate about so many issues, I think every American would agree: this year was not boring.

Thanks to vibrant free media in the United States and here in South Africa, I do not need to tell you about everything that has happened over the past 10 months. South Africans have followed with interest and commented with wisdom and intelligence on events in my own country. To this healthy discussion, let me offer some reflections on the US-South Africa relationship in the context of America's ongoing transition.

As I read articles, side-by-side in South African newspapers, about America's and South Africa's challenges, it occurs to

me: neither of us pretends our country or our society is perfect. On the contrary, we recognise that our strength lies in being open about our past and honest about our ongoing struggle to live up to our principles. We admit that democracy is messy, especially in the short term, but we would never sacrifice our rights for the illusion of stability that authoritarianism claims to offer.

That profound commitment to our shared values is the bedrock of our relationship. But in the last 25 years, across successive US administrations, we have built a partnership that benefits Americans and South Africans. Our health experts worked together to turn the tide against HIV, including to save lives and to ensure those affected by AIDS can live healthy and productive lives. And the US government donation of a thousand ventilators, PPE, a field hospital, and our partnership with South African health experts on the development of a vaccine is saving South African lives.

Our agricultural experts have teamed up with agricultural producers to open markets and share best practices to benefit farmers and consumers in both countries. Our educational institutions have partnered to expand access to quality education at all levels, and to advance scientific discovery, historic research, and our understanding of challenges facing humankind. Our companies have partnered to create innovative products and jobs that improve life and increase prosperity.

Our police and judicial authorities have teamed up to investigate, prosecute, and sentence transnational criminals, making our citizens safer. Our artists have collaborated to create new masterpieces, enriching our lives. Equally important, we remain committed to expanding dialogue across all sectors on diversity, inclusion and racial injustice. Rest assured, this important work to propel our bilateral relationship continues unabated, despite the transitions in Washington and here in Pretoria.

*Written by John Groarke, Charge d'Affaires,
U.S. Embassy South Africa
Originally published by News24*

SA's Covid-19 vaccine trials hold key

lessons for future partnerships

Many countries around the world have started rolling out Covid-19 vaccines, however, it's clear that distribution is not symmetrical. High-income countries have access to disproportionate quantities of limited supplies. Vaccine nationalism, stockpiling and profit-driven strategies of global pharmaceutical manufacturers have shown up global health inequities.

More than 100 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines have been administered globally to date. Only about 200 000 (0.2%) have been in Africa. South Africa is one of the first countries in sub-Saharan Africa to procure vaccines. The country has some of the highest reported cases of Covid-19 in the region.

Despite hosting a clinical trial of the AstraZeneca vaccine, South Africa was unable to secure a fair pricing agreement.

The country procured its first delivery of the AstraZeneca vaccine from the largest vaccine manufacturer in the world, the Serum Institute of India. A million doses of the vaccine arrived at a cost of \$5.25 per dose. This is more than double the \$2.16 per dose paid by European Union countries to AstraZeneca. It was disappointing for research participants and other citizens alike. By not leveraging South Africa's participation in clinical trials, authorities violated the well-established fundamental principles of post-trial access and benefit sharing in research.

Post-trial access and benefit-sharing can apply to participants in a specific trial. But they can also extend to the community in which the research was conducted.

There's no international policy guideline that specifically addresses the scope and nature of benefits on a national scale. Some may argue that the scientists who conduct clinical trials shouldn't negotiate for benefits. But we argue that in a pandemic situation, sponsors, researchers and research ethics committees must ensure the highest scientific standards and negotiate post-trial benefits in advance.

Ordinarily, post-trial access can be delayed by local product registration. It can take around five years to have a medical product or device registered. In contrast, emergency use authorisation of Covid-19 vaccines has made products available much sooner – weeks to months after trial completion. This increases the possibility of successfully negotiating post-trial access for participants, communities and, in a pandemic, even for countries. Given the complexity of vaccine procurement, this responsibility must be collective. It falls on global health institutions, national governments, researchers, research ethics committees and even research participants.



Some researchers, while responsible for ensuring the highest level of scientific integrity, seem to have drawn a false dichotomy between their scientific obligations and their ethical responsibilities to their study participants, communities and country. Negotiating for post-trial access to vaccines could be seen as a conflict of interest or an unfair inducement. But we don't agree. These guidelines ensure that the science is robust while also paying necessary attention to ethics. Therefore, negotiating for access cannot be viewed as a perverse incentive.

Research ethics committees have a duty during pandemics to insist on a benefit-sharing plan for urgent and important research, especially for clinical trials conducted in the public interest. No one is safe from Covid-19 until everyone is safe. The world is in this together and low- and middle-income countries should not be left behind. It is hoped that as research continues with the Johnson and Johnson vaccine in South Africa, fair pricing agreements have already been negotiated.

Written by Keymanthri Moodley, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Medicine and Director of the Centre for Medical Ethics and Law, Stellenbosch University and Theresa Rossouw, Professor, University of Pretoria

Virtual diplomacy is here to stay post Covid-19



It is undeniable that Covid-19 has brought about fundamental changes in the world of work globally, and the City's International Relations was not spared either. The City has had to re-imagine the world of work to ensure we bring about innovation and sustainability in the face of dealing with the impact of Covid-19.

The pandemic has brought about a change in approach to international relations in the global architecture. It has compelled the City to evaluate how Covid-19 has affected our global stakeholders, how their priorities may have changed, as well as a real challenge of a loss of diplomats and other officials due to Covid-19 complications.

Against this backdrop, diplomats worldwide are facing a multitude of challenges in their work, and City diplomats are not immune either. Diplomats have had to migrate most of their work output to adapt to virtual platforms while phasing out or holding off face-to-face engagements.

The City was also faced with making a shift from face-to-face international engagement to virtual diplomacy. Lockdown Level 5 forced the City to explore technological platforms to allow for the continuation of international dialogue. The City also needed to enable continued advancement of its international relations agenda.


It was interesting to note that some of the City's virtual engagements gathered more traction and had more participants than the traditional methods. Ease of access afforded more people to participate and to get involved.

The new virtual environment demands that agents of diplomacy be agile and be in a position to change the pace of executing work at a fast rate. However, when engaging virtually at conferences, webinars, roundtables and other scenarios, there is no opportunity to caucus with colleagues and the City's diplomats have had to trust their instincts and expertise.

With the advent of Covid-19, the City has migrated the normally robust face-to-face Diplomatic Corps engagements, the International Relations Roundtable Dialogue and the International Relations Forum to virtual platforms and the attendance has been satisfactory, with stakeholders engaging in discussions in a robust manner.

In light of all of this, it's suffice to say virtual diplomacy is here to stay, even post Covid-19.

Written by Thusani Mulaudzi, Deputy Director: International Relations and Global Networks



Africa is no island, cooperation crucial in fight against global pandemic

While we celebrate our continent's resilience and determination to go it alone against Covid-19, we must acknowledge that we are no island. In this pandemic no country is self-sufficient; we need each other, and we need our international partners to help us to emerge from this pandemic.

The predictions about the economic and health impacts of Covid-19 on Africa are dismal. The global economic slowdown is disrupting supply chains and suppressing demand for African exports, which will impact the tax revenue of governments. Fiscal shortfalls and increasing pressure on currencies will increase job losses, decrease foreign direct investment (FDI) and accelerate negative economic growth, with many of Africa's young people facing hunger, poverty and lost opportunities.

As African citizens, we can't overcome these challenges alone. We need to collaborate as never before and revive and consolidate the international connections we have for the good of those in our communities. As chair of the Southern Africa-Canada Chamber of Commerce (Sacanham), I recently participated in a webinar hosted from Toronto with multiple stakeholders from the private and public sector in Canada and across Africa. I was heartened by the urgency and conviction of this important international solidarity partner that is known for its impartiality, diplomacy and impeccable humanitarian track record.

Canadian Small Business, Exports and Trade Minister, Minister Mary Ng, discussed the role of the diaspora in deepening Canada-Africa trade and investment during this time while highlighting Africa's essential place in Canada's trade diversification. The country's role as a respected broker on the continent was reiterated on the webinar, as it supports our ideal for The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) — which will be the largest free trade zone since the advent of the World Trade Organisation.

During the conference call, McKinsey also presented its report, *Tackling Covid-19 in Africa: An unfolding health and economic crisis that demands bold action*. The report warned that Africa's GDP could be cut by three to eight percentage points in 2020. McKinsey's report encourages us as African governments, private sector and development institutions to double down on our already proven resolve and significantly expand existing efforts to safeguard economies and livelihoods across Africa.

The report highlights the opportunity to take bolder, more creative steps to secure supply chains of essential products, contain the health crisis, maintain the stability of financial systems, help businesses survive the crisis, and support households' economic welfare. We can only double down if we work together. Now is not the time for our leaders to be introverted, but to strengthen collaboration among ourselves, to tap into international partnerships and to get cracking on plans for our post-Covid economic recovery.

Africa and all her countries have an important role to play on the global stage. Former South African President Nelson Mandela was one of the recent pioneers that opened the eyes of the world to the Africa continent and put us on a global stage. Mandela's global appeal helped to rebuild South Africa after 1994 when the state coffers were decimated. Many strong African leaders could pick up the mantle of "Madiba magic" at this time, including Ramaphosa.

My appeal to all African citizens right now is to get bold, to get creative, to open up your post-1994 directories and tap into the networks of our solidarity partners

so that we can provide immediate relief and start planning for our urgent, necessary recovery. Together as citizens and in partnership with international hands and our friends we can make good on our advances.

Written by Greg Nott, Chairman of the Southern African-Canadian Business Chamber

Collaborative investment needed to support women's recovery from Covid-19

A virtual ministerial roundtable meeting organised by UN Women brought to the forefront the need to safeguard women's rights and put in place deliberate measures to advance gender equality, as part of Covid-19 response and recovery interventions.

The event, titled Ensuring Progress Towards SDG 5 Amid the Covid-19 pandemic – from Response to Recovery: Experiences from China and Global Partners, was part of a South-South Cooperation initiative, which refers to a framework that enables the exchange of ideas, experiences, and opportunities between entrepreneurs, communities, and experts from the Global South. More than 85 participants, including government representatives from China, Tanzania, Jordan, Pakistani, Nigeria, Liberia, Mali, Uganda, Egypt and Myanmar, shared how they are addressing gender-related issues during the pandemic and through recovery programmes in their countries.

The lessons emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic show that while the virus may not discriminate, its economic, social and health impacts are different for men and women and achieving gender equality cannot be placed on the backburner.

The participants shared how some countries have gender-responsive policy mechanisms, up-scaling emergency

support for the most vulnerable and the 'new poor.' Governments have acted decisively to end gender-based violence, including sexual violence; and improved data analytics and digital technology to enhance service delivery. If these measures are integrated as longer-term strategies, they can transform and improve disaster preparedness and protection against future shocks.

To contain Covid-19, the Government of China has applied a 'whole society intervention approach' and demonstrated its political will to advance gender equality through the inclusion of women across key sectors. This contributed to the country's success in containing the pandemic.

Huang Xiaowei, Vice President and First Member of the Secretariat of the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), and Vice-Chairperson of the National Working Committee on Children and Women under the State Council of China, also proposed that "while we are taking actions to combat the pandemic and drive for social-economic recovery, we must place greater consideration on women's needs, listen to their voices, and take effective measures to safeguard their rights and interests. We must emphasise women's participation and contribution, focus on the active roles [that] women play, and give conscientious attention to the lives and development of women."

The lessons from China's experience show that when gender-sensitive mechanisms addressing the needs of women and girls are put in place across all sectors, lives can be saved, and livelihoods protected. However, in many countries in Africa, Asia Pacific, the Arab States and the Middle East, progress is still uneven and uncertain.

The participants reflected that in DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone, women were still trying to recover from the effects of the Ebola virus when the coronavirus struck. The pandemic has also worsened situations in conflict-affected countries, including Yemen, Libya, Palestine and Syria, and increased the need for resources in countries suffering from food insecurity and rising rate of HIV and AIDS.

"We have seen that, in many pandemics, women never recover from the impact and their pain, and as a result, the effects become a lifetime experience. History should not repeat itself, and that is why partnerships like this one are so critical to ensure gender-responsive measures are institutionalised in the national response and recovery plan of all countries. We need to strengthen collaborative efforts in safeguarding the interests of women and girls, and to help countries get back on track in achieving SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of all women," said UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka in her keynote address.

A UN Women situation report on "the impact of Covid-19 on gender equality in the Arab region" shows the pandemic is expected to result in the loss of 1.7 million jobs, and this includes over 700 000 jobs held by women.

In Pakistan, Dr Sania Nishtar, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection, said only 10 days after the Covid-19 outbreak, the government launched its largest emergency operation that

has so far reached 14 million vulnerable families, including female-headed households, with unconditional cash transfers. The world's fifth-largest nation has also improved its social protection programmes targeting women and girls to protect livelihoods and ensure girls remained in school.

Lessons from Myanmar reflected the importance of creating longer-term solutions and sustainable employment opportunities for women. "The pandemic has robbed many women of their livelihoods in the garment, tourism, agriculture and domestic sectors," said Dr Wah-Wah Maung, Director General of the Pension Department of the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry in Myanmar. "As many were not formally employed, they did not have insurances or any other form of protection." The Government of Myanmar is working with partners to provide interest-free loans to women-owned enterprises and to provide unconditional cash and food to vulnerable families, including female-headed households.

"Sectors of our population, especially those most marginalised because of insecurity, instability and inequalities, are the ones absorbing the worst impacts. Yet, the same people, and in particular women, are being called upon to protect and care for families, children, the elderly and the sick," noted Roberta Clarke, Officer in Charge of UN Women East and Southern Africa.

As countries around the world battle the pandemic and its multi-dimensional impacts, UN Women continue to work with governments and civil society to support gender-responsive fiscal stimulus packages, livelihood protection, and rapid needs' assessments of women on the ground, prevention of violence against women and promotion of equal sharing of care work, among other initiatives. (Source: UN Women, February 2021).





Barbados prime minister calls for global corporation

Mia Amor Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados has called for true global partnerships and actions in response to challenges, particularly concerning equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines.

Mottley says international dialogue has regrettably been overtaken by Covid-19 – not just the public health response and what we need to do to save lives, but also current and future livelihoods: making sure that the recovery is less about building back – because in many respects we should not be repeating the approaches of the past – but build forward better.

“This pandemic is not the only global threat we face, as, at the same time, the climate crisis continues to be more critical than ever. The two Cs of Covid and the climate crisis are not the only ones that trouble us. The Caribbean region faces the simultaneous threat of chronic non-communicable diseases (CNCs), crime, in all its forms, and perhaps the fifth and final C which is common across the others – the consequences of colonialism, which cause us to strengthen our organised action around securing reparations,” she explains.

Mottley says countries in the region often suffer as a result of their small size. “The island nations and most of the countries of the Caribbean Basin are small, but our region is large, particularly in its diversity and historic contribution to global economic wealth as it now exists, though held by others and not by us. Because of our small terrestrial size, we are, it seems, difficult for many to see, literally and otherwise.

And even when we are seen, it is similarly difficult for many to justify action based on economic arguments of scale,” she says.

Mottley notes that the pandemic has seen some countries less able to access critical vaccines needed to protect their citizens, because of their size and the scope of power.

“Regrettably, we seem not to be able to acknowledge that until every country is safe, no country is safe,” she says.

The Prime Minister also calls for a significant increase in overall climate finance.

“We welcome the positive sign that the size of adaptation projects funded by the multilateral funds serving the Paris Agreement (the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility) are increasing. According to the latest Adaptation Gap Report, since 2017, 21 new projects have had a value of more than US\$25 million. We applaud the Green Climate Fund for its promise to allocate at least 40 percent of its pledged funds over the first replenishment period, up to December 2023, to adaptation.”

Mottley says Roofs to Reefs is “our sustainable development model for the next ten years”. She also notes that other partnerships must be sought to achieve targets.

“Alongside a new financial architecture, there are other efforts to be undertaken, including an agreement on internationally accepted methodologies to quantify the significant roles of the Caribbean Sea and the associated reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves in carbon sequestration, which would allow our roles in the mitigation fight to be recognised alongside those of our larger neighbours.”

Written by Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados

Joburg clinches top accolade for Covid-19 library innovation



The City's Directorate of Libraries, which oversees all municipal libraries has clinched the 2020 Public Library Innovation Award for its #Covid-19 Facebook digital video series.

The accolade, with a \$1 500 prize purse was awarded by the international non-profit organisation, Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL).

EIFL supports libraries in developing countries in Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe and Latin America to enable access to knowledge for education, learning, research and sustainable community development.

Joburg Libraries were recognised for their contribution to providing remote digital library services during the Covid-19 lockdown, which restricted public movement, including library visits. The EIFL highlights the City's innovative use of digital technology to improve people's lives. It also acknowledges the work of all library staff who responded to the call for online services during the hard lockdown.

Cllr Margaret Arnolds, the MMC for Community Development commends all City librarians who used their personal computers, smart devices and Internet connectivity to enable remote digital learning during last year's hard lockdown.

"This shows dedication to serving Joburg communities," she adds.

The City's digital video series featured reading development, the use of cellphone applications at home as well as access to online content for e-learning and personal development.

"This award is dedicated to all our library users who access our services from home or through library visits. You are our priority, you matter," says Cllr Arnolds.

She notes that librarians who answered the call to be creative and contribute ideas, content and digital multimedia technology are the real heroes.

"A special acknowledgement goes to the e-Learning Manager who championed this initiative. A big thanks to all senior management who encouraged library staff to participate in the video series and the Facebook admin team for coordinating the submission, editing and managing the video series," she explains.

The MMC says the recognition of the City's digital exploits bodes well for the overarching municipal strategy to transform the organisation into a smart, digital City.

"Our strategy is to encourage tech innovations and new ways of providing library services post-Covid-19."