

‘CORONIZATION’ OF GLOBAL ORDER AND AFRICA

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Analysis

After Asia, Europe and America have become epicenters of the Coronavirus crisis, the pandemic has turned its hard face to Africa continent for a while. According to head of the World Health Organization (WHO) epidemics in West Europe are in decline but for many countries the crisis is just starting. Several countries that seem stable so far are now seeing an upsurge in Covid-19 cases.ⁱ As figures related to patients and death toll increases in Africa, Coronavirus touches every aspect of life including major and minor economic activities. In terms of Covid-19 active cases, South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, the Canary Islands and Cameroon are the continent’s hotspots for the time being.

There is no single territory able to isolate itself from the pandemic due to the high level of globalization of the world during the last decades. The problem is the same for all but response mechanisms varies according to each country’s capacity. Hence it is not a surprise that

African countries will have the toughest battle. According to academician Belay Begashaw, “Low-income countries (the majority being in Africa) who are struggling to run decent economy under normal circumstances will be disadvantaged in coping with this earth-shaking situation.”ⁱⁱ Albert Zeufack, Chief Economist for Africa at the World Bank, indicates that African states do not have much room at their response to Covid-19 crisis due to their fiscal positions that already deteriorated.ⁱⁱⁱ

For African countries Coronavirus is just another front to be battled along with other major challenges such as poverty, education gap, poor infrastructure etc. Nigeria for instance, with a population of 200 million people, has to battle with Covid-19 along with Lassa fever; or Democratic Republic of Congo has been fighting the Ebola outbreak since 2018. The country has measles and cholera outbreaks simultaneously as well. The Central African Republic is



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just another African country having measles outbreak in Corona days. WHO also warned that Malaria deaths could double in Africa this year because of Corona-linked restrictions. As known, more than 350 thousand people die due to Malaria each year in Africa.^{iv} Moreover, influenza season is just starting in the southern parts of the continent. So countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique have to intensify their battle against both enemies to say the least.

Effective response to pandemic requires smart strategy, better equipment and infrastructure. From this angle there lays a huge challenge for Africa. Things are moving fast and response to epidemic requires well-organized healthcare and state system. Countries in the continent are not lucky in terms the availability of test kits, surgical masks, protective dresses and ventilators. For instance, the Central African Republic, with a population of 5 million, has only 3 ventilators and Burkina Faso, with a population of 20 million, has only 12 intensive care beds.^v Besides, unfortunately, African countries are still highly dependent on overseas markets for medical items.

Although there were many obstacles faced by Africa it seems that in this crisis, the positive side of Africa is its demographic structure. The continent is the youngest on earth. 60% of Africa's population is under 24 years old while only 5% of its population is above 60. The rest 35% spreads between 25 and 59.^{vi} It is so far known that mortality rate in Covid-19 is higher amongst the elderly though young people are also hit by the illness. However, the advantage of Africa's young demographic structure is unique. It might be expected that mortality rate in Africa would be lower than mortality rates of Europe, America and Asia.

Rising Africa vs. Recessed Africa

The Coronavirus pandemic is not imposing threat on medical field only; it brings challenges to economic activities and supply chains too. On the economic level the Corona pandemic

threatens the continent's most powerful image that has been developed through the narrative of 'Rising Africa' after the millennium. As known, Africa recorded immense economic developments in the last two decades. However, after the Corona outbreak the World Bank predicts recession for sub-Saharan Africa for the first time in 25 years.^{vii} According to the bank Africa will experience negative growth due to the side effects of the pandemic. Low outcome from agricultural, mining, tourism and fishing activities put serious challenges ahead of Africa. Lockdowns and restrictions on different levels pose especially severe impact on low-income groups.

Africa is a continent that is a warehouse of industrial production. 'Coronization' of the world already suspended several industrial activities across the world. Lockdowns and low mobility lowered oil prices on the global scale as well. Several oil-producing African countries have been negatively affected from such low oil pricing. However, the effects are not limited within the oil industry. For instance, diamond industry, one of the key mining industry in Africa, also downsized production.^{viii} Majority of African states' budget such as Nigeria, Angola, Botswana, South Sudan etc. depend on revenues on mono-mineral mining activities rather than industrial income. Even the continent's aviation sector has been badly shaken from the pandemic. As it can be understood, economic burden caused by the Corona pandemic on Africa could go beyond expected limits and the recovery might take longer. At the end, the rising image of Africa might be seriously scarred.

Africa and Post-Corona World Order

While the rise of nationalism and retreat from globalization are the first experienced symptoms generated by the Coronavirus pandemic, "self-sufficiency" became a key motto for nations since global mechanisms became paralyzed in a blink of the eye. Some believe that nothing will be the same after Coronavirus; therefore, the other aspect of the pandemic is related to post-Corona world order and Africa's place in it.

In this regard prominent African thinkers and intellectuals have also recently published an open-letter addressing African leaders to act wise and work in favor of African populations and priorities in this critical situation that already shaken the global order. African intellectuals see the Corona pandemic as an opportunity to spur radical change in order to confront deep structural problems of Africa.

^{ix} In a similar vein, former Prime Minister of Senegal Cheike Hadjibou Soumaré asserts that due to the Corona outbreak the gap between rich and poor countries is suddenly bridged because consequences due to the pandemic is the same for all. Soumaré further calls solidarity for all Africa as an African nation to take place better place in the new world order.^x

It is at the hand of African leaders to turn tides of the pandemic upside down and preserve Africa's image although there were many deep structural problems in the past. According to David

Mwambari the pandemic presents an opportunity for African people to see themselves differently since the strong image of Europe has faded. This historic moment gives an opportunity to fast track decolonization process for Africans. Therefore the continent now have a chance to become more autonomous and self-reliant.^{xi}

For states, Covid-19 crisis definitely brought serious challenges and opportunities. Impact of the crisis on each state varies since monetary, technical and healthcare capacities of each country are different. From the economical perspective Africa looks very fragile but the continent's young demographic structure presents a unique opportunity for Africa. If smart strategies and policies that support solidarity, innovation and cooperation amongst African nations are implemented by African leaders, for sure, Africa could turn the tides of the pandemic on its advantage and maintain a better place in the new world order.

Endnotes

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