

The Continent

with **Mail & Guardian**

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

How not to handle
a pandemic



The People v. The Ostriches

Not all world leaders are taking the fight against Covid-19 seriously. Oliver Stuenkel, a professor of international relations in Brazil, coined the term ‘The Ostrich Alliance’ to refer to presidents who choose to stick their head in the sand rather than deal with the threat of the pandemic.

US President Donald Trump, who this week suggested that the coronavirus could be cured with an injection of disinfectant (it can't) or UV light (not true), is an obvious member of this disreputable coalition. So too is Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, who has repeatedly ignored and challenged the advice of health authorities and fired his popular health minister.

This week, we are focusing on our own ostriches.

For the most part, Africa's response to the pandemic has been impressive.

Between the World Health Organisation and the Africa Centres for Disease Control, statistics and advice have been shared quickly and effectively between countries.

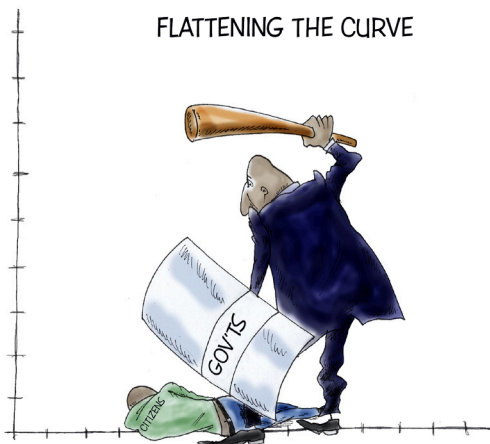
Most countries have taken swift action, introducing emergency lockdown measures and vigorously promoting public health messages. This is not our first epidemic, after all.

But there are some leaders who are wilfully ignoring public health expertise and advice. They want to do it their own way — with potentially devastating consequences for their citizens.

In this edition of *The Continent*, we shine a spotlight on the presidents of Tanzania, Burundi, Cameroon and Madagascar, among others. Early evidence suggests they are failing to rise to this gravest of occasions — but it's not too late to change course. ■

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DO YOU KNOW ANY HEROES?

In next week's issue, we are profiling the heroes on the frontline of our response to Covid-19. The nurses. The doctors. The researchers hunting for a vaccine. The farmers, drivers and supermarket cashiers keeping the supply chains open. The ordinary people going above and beyond.

Do you know a hero? We want to hear from you. Let us know who they are and what makes them so special, and we may feature them in the pages of *The Continent*. Send us a message on the phone number or email address below, and one of our journalists will get back to you.

Inside:

- **Pata Pata Part II:** Angelique Kidjo reworks the classic
- **The Great Escape:** From quarantine to...a bar?
- **The News Quiz:** Are you the African Renaissance?
- **PLUS** reporting from Madagascar, Cameroon, Nigeria, South Africa, Malawi, South Sudan, Angola and the Sahel

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If you enjoyed this edition of The Continent, please share it with your friends and colleagues. You are a part of the work that we do.

South Sudan

UN under fire in South Sudan

South Sudan's first case of Covid-19 was confirmed to be a United Nations staffer. David Monodanga

So far, South Sudan has recorded five cases of Covid-19. The first case was confirmed to be a staffer with the United Nations, leading to bitter public criticism of the international organisation.

“They are pretty harsh comments. [UN staff] didn't do anything wrong. It is like catching a cold. They did not do anything deliberately on purpose.” said David Shearer, the head of the UN mission in South Sudan, in an interview with the *Mail & Guardian*.

Tensions are so high that President Salva Kiir has had to warn citizens against using hate speech or making racist remarks towards UN staff and other foreigners residing in the country. “I must warn you that Covid-19 can be brought into the country by anyone, including South Sudanese,” Kiir said in a speech on national television.

These tensions were exacerbated when one UN staffer, who had come into contact with a Covid-19 patient, fled quarantine and left the country - potentially putting people at risk in the process.

In a statement, the UN said that any staff who fail to adhere to self-isolation requirements would be disciplined, adding that it was not involved in the staffer's escape.

South Sudan's government has said that it will hold the UN accountable if this incident leads to a further spreading of the virus.

Foreigners working in the country have expressed concern over being targeted in xenophobic attacks, as a result of the rise in tensions. Caroline Wanjui, a Kenyan businesswoman, said that the comments she has been noting on social media are blaming nonresidents like herself for importing the virus. “When they start such xenophobic remarks we are not safe. I am worried about my life,” said Wanjui.

Tyson Otieno, a Kenyan barber in Juba, said that the virus should not be driving people apart. “Different foreign communities living in South Sudan are exposed to the same risks of contracting coronavirus as the nationals. ■

Malawi



The president ordered a lockdown. The court said no.

Golden Matonga

It took Malawi's President Peter Mutharika a long time to address the looming threat of the Covid-19 pandemic. But when he finally got around to it, on April 14, he followed in the footsteps of most other world leaders and announced drastic measures: imposing a state of disaster and a national 21-day lockdown, to begin on April 18.

The president's announcement was not well received. Protests broke out in the streets of major cities. Doctors and nurses downed tools. The president was even sued by a civil society group,

Popular protests: The president's decision to impose a lockdown was met with widespread opposition
(Photo: Amos Gumulira for AFP via Getty Images)

the Malawi Human Rights Defenders Coalition, which argued that the president had not prepared an adequate safety net to protect the poor.

In a stunning decision, the high court in Lilongwe ruled against the president, setting aside the lockdown.

This multi-pronged resistance to Mutharika's efforts to contain the coronavirus can only be understood against the backdrop of Malawi's recent political history. Last year's presidential election, which Mutharika won, was nullified by the constitutional court, which cited widespread irregularities. As a result, many parts of Malawian society do not feel that the president has earned their trust.

"We are not against the lockdown per se, we are only asking for measures that will ensure the poorest of our citizens are cushioned," said Gift Trapence, chairperson of the Human Rights Defenders Coalition.

That decision is set to be reviewed next week. By then, Mutharika may have come up with a plan to alleviate the impact on Malawi's poorest citizens — but it is doubtful he would have had enough time to regain that lost trust. ■

Nigeria

Obituary

Abba Kyari, 1952 - 2020

The president loses his right hand man

Aanu Adeoye

A bba Kyari, the chief of staff to Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari and regarded by many as perhaps the second most powerful man in Nigerian politics - behind only the president himself - died on April 17 in Lagos. The jockeying to replace him has already begun.

The cause of death was Covid-19.

Even in death, Kyari was trailed by controversy. He was a public figure, yet barely anything about his personal life was known - not even his age. It took an exclusive report by Premium Times to reveal his age at the time of death as 67.

Before entering politics, he worked as a prominent lawyer and a banker. He was one of the first appointments that Buhari made when elected in 2015. Beyond the rarefied circles of Nigeria's elite, he was a little known outsider who had never run for public office.

He was a workaholic, on duty seven days a week, and was quickly drawn into



The Gatekeeper: Abba Kyari played a key role in controlling access to President Buhari (Photo: supplied)

high-level politics with other Buhari loyalists. "Kyari ran the government," said Cheta Nwanze, the lead partner at the Lagos-based risk consultancy SBM Intelligence.

But it was obvious that Kyari, a true believer in state intervention in economic affairs, carried a firm seal of approval from the president. The two men met when Kyari was a student and were friends for 42 years.

What happens next in the Buhari administration with three years still to run is now unclear. "There is a fair chance of a fistfight for his position," Nwanze said. "The replacement, if that person is also a strong character, will effectively run the country." ■

Aanu Adeoye is a media fellow with Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

Angelique Kidjo reinvents a classic

Kwanele Sosibo

There is no doubt that Beninese singer-songwriter Angelique Kidjo was severely moved by the death of Cameroonian megastar Manu Dibango, who died in March in a French hospital as a result of contracting the coronavirus.

As the news of his death began to circulate, she posted a video of herself and the great saxophone player and songwriter going over the coda of his most famous jam, 'Soul Makossa'. It is the piece that, infamously, Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones couldn't help but touch, sampling it in 'Wanna Be Startin' - and getting their fingers burnt via a lawsuit in the process.

As one of the world's greatest performers and vocalists, Kidjo understands pedigree, which is why in Austin, Texas in 2016, she introduced 'Pata Pata' without needing to name it or the woman who co-composed it and made it famous, Miriam Makeba.

A feel-good 60s marabi song about a touchy feely dance, 'Pata Pata' has been remade and recorded countless times, including by Dibango. Now Kidjo has remade it yet again, this time in an effort



Icon: Miriam Makeba in a recording studio in New York in 1969. Photo: Popsie Randolph/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

to raise awareness about the dangers of Covid-19.

In Xhosa, 'pata' means 'touch'. Reworked lyrics include:

It's a time to sit it out

This is no-pata-pata

Stay at home and wait it out

We need to keep our hands clean

So no-pata pata

***Don't touch your face,
keep distance please.***

Kidjo's new version has the electronic polyrhythms one would expect from the singer, and the urgency of a new message. Once we get over the shock of her having gone there, the import of the message will hopefully sink in. ■

The Week in Numbers

2

The number of summons that Togolese opposition leader Agbéyomé Kodjo ignored before he was arrested this week. Kodjo has rejected President Faure Gnassingbé's election win this year, saying the vote was rigged.

68

The age of a woman in Nigeria who recently gave birth to twins. Margaret Adenuga went through three IVF procedures before having her baby girl and boy.

131

The number of people who have been killed by a malaria outbreak as Zimbabwe's health system is already stretched by the Covid-19 pandemic. The World Health Organisation has warned that malaria deaths could double this year if necessary public health interventions are ignored due to the coronavirus pandemic.



10 seconds

The length of time it took South African president Cyril Ramaphosa to put on his face mask at the end of his address to the nation on Thursday - giving South Africans some much needed comic relief.

Ramaphosa has been widely lauded for his response to the pandemic. As one South African comic put it, referring to Ramaphosa's troubles with his headgear: "Not all heroes wear masks".

8

The number of crew members who are thought to have been kidnapped off of a Singapore-flagged container ship. Pirates stormed the ship in the Gulf of Guinea, off Benin.

\$26 billion

The amount of money Cyril Ramaphosa said would be injected into the South Africa economy, prioritising health departments, social grants and businesses subsidies.

Cameroon's language barriers

Poor translation is hampering the response to the pandemic - and linguistic divides underpin conflict.

Gina Sondo

Prospective candidates for the International Relations Institute of Cameroon, an institution of the University of Yaoundé, are required to write an entrance exam.

I took this exam in 2012. I nearly did not pass.

There are two official languages in Cameroon: English and French. I grew up speaking English, part of a sizeable minority of Cameroonians who do so. But the dominant language in our government and institutions is French, and this can lead to unfortunate - and sometimes dangerous - misunderstandings.

In my exam, the essay question had been set in French, and translated into English. But the translation did not really make sense. I checked the French version, and realised the original question was different to what had been translated.

I was fortunate that I understood enough French to spot the mistake. I passed the exam, although I did not gain entrance to the Institute in this particular round.

I succeeded later that year, and found myself studying in French for the first



time. I had completed my undergraduate degree in journalism at the University of Buea, where English is the medium of instruction.

Believe me, it was difficult to adjust. After my first lecture I cried. But thanks to some good friends, and plenty of determination, by the second semester of the the first year I was managing. The International Relations Institute did make an effort to translate some exam questions into English, but these



Lost in translation: This restaurant in Buea was razed in fighting between Cameroon's military and separatist rebels (Photo: Giles Clarke for UNOCHA via Getty Images)

translations were never reliable - if you could not refer to the original French question, you could go seriously off topic.

In 2016 I completed my studies, and started working as a professional journalist. We often receive official communications in both French and English, but I have learned to rely on the French version - because often, these translations are not done professionally, and the two texts do not always agree with each other.

There is no reason why these official communications should not be professionally translated. Cameroon has plenty of trained translators, as well as the highly-respected Advanced School of Translation and Interpreters. So why are citizens not receiving accurate information in both official languages?

As the country grapples with the coronavirus pandemic, the importance of accurate translation is paramount. Effective communication with citizens

- both English-speaking and French-speaking - is vital. So far, I have received health promotion messages from the ministry of public health only in French. This is not good enough. Where have all the translators gone?

Cameroon's divisions between English and French speakers manifest in other, more sinister ways. The Anglophone sections of the country feel marginalised by the predominantly Francophone government.

In 2016, these tensions spilled over into protests and conflict, which has developed into a full-blown civil war which has killed thousands of people, and left hundreds of thousands more displaced. A new government initiative - the commission for the promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism in Cameroon - has done little to bridge these linguistic divides. ■

Gina Sondo is a journalist and writer from Cameroon.

ORAL HISTORY

Escape from quarantine

77

There were 200 people in quarantine at the Kenya Medical Training College (KMTc) in Nairobi - until Tuesday this week, when around 50 of them escaped by jumping over the walls and running off into the neighbourhood.



"In a scene that mimics a prison break, a video posted on social media depicted the escapees climbing over the wall and landing on Mbagathi Road. They then blended in with pedestrians and escaped towards Nairobi West. The violators of government rules on isolation carried their suitcases and personal effects after throwing them over the concrete fence." **Vincent Achuka and Verah Okeyo, Daily Nation newspaper**

"Now, we begin tonight with the story of that dramatic escape from quarantine that went viral yesterday. Earlier today, two of the 50 escapees were arrested in Nairobi's Roysambu area where they were allegedly having a drink...at a local bar." **Jeff Koinange, Citizen TV**

"I jumped because I had been there for 72 hours and I was being told to pay 2000 Kenyan shillings every day...I was not going there for fattening, I was going there to be tested for corona, because they bundled me out of a club." **Unnamed escapee, after being arrested outside the Chief's Office pub in Roysambu.**

"If an individual...jumped the fence at KMTc, and is now with you, that individual is going to cost you very, very highly. That individual could end up killing your child. It is therefore imperative that you call the police." **Mutahi Kagwe, Health Cabinet Secretary.**

"For those ones, those who we saw escaping. They should not think they have won. We know them and we will find them," **Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenyan President.**

Climate drives conflict in the Sahel. Or does it?

Sipho Kings

Shifting sands: A Fulani herdsman in Bermo, Niger, searching for pasture.

(Photo: Marco Longari for AFP.)

It stopped raining properly in the central Sahel — Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso — in the late 1960s. A mega drought followed, lasting nearly two decades. Since then, just five years have seen above-average rainfall. At the same time, particularly in central Mali, there has been a proliferation of armed groups, some claiming to act in the name of jihad.

A narrative has grown that links this growth in violence to resource scarcity, and blames that scarcity on growing temperatures and climate change. It has meant foreign aid flowing in, related to combating climate change and a series of decisions aimed at increasing resource production.

But, like with many cases where climate change is taken as the main reason for events, this narrative has big faults. This is confirmed in a new report from the International Crisis Group.

The report argues that droughts in

the 1970s and 1980s decimated cattle herds. Farmers, while also struggling, could keep growing and eventually created a surplus that they could sell. They bought cattle and employed the now destitute herders, dramatically altering the power balance in the region. Since then, government policies focused on food security and a modernisation in agriculture have further benefited farmers. So, while productivity has actually gone up (even with droughts) there has been a failure of governance in balancing competing interests. This has meant people being pushed towards armed groups.

The research warns that blaming this on climate change and resource scarcity runs the “risk of underestimating the weight of the political dynamics that underlie these conflicts”. It also gives leaders an external force that they can blame, which perhaps explains why this narrative is so popular. ■

Lockdown leaves athletes uncertain about their future

Tolu Olasoji

Evelyn Akhator plays basketball for a living. The 25-year-old is a superstar, representing Nigeria's national team and French club Flammes Carolo, but now she is stuck in lockdown in Lagos and she does not even have a basketball to train with. "Few days of not seeing a basketball got me frustrated and I was like 'I can't do this.' I just had to be positive at the end of the day because we can't control the situation," she told the Mail & Guardian.

Akhator returned to Lagos when the French league was cancelled, and now she can't get to her home in the United States because of the lockdown. She is in limbo - and, for athletes all around the world, hers is an all too familiar story.

Akwasi Frimpong, the Ghanaian skeleton racer, is at home in Utah with his wife and daughter. He does not have his metal sled, so he can't do any

practising, nor does he have access to a gym. "I mostly use my body weight to do most of the workout, so I'm not gaining a lot of weight, but there is no access to do the explosive routines required for skeleton," he said.

His planned travels across Europe, Africa and Australia for races have now been cancelled, and two sponsors have dropped out. His quest to become Africa's first-ever Winter Olympics medalist, in Beijing 2022, hangs in the balance.

To make up for the lack of sport, Akhator, Frimpong and other athletes have turned to both traditional and social media: granting more interviews than usual (including to this publication), and hosting online workout sessions.

"Obviously we have no option, it is another way to ease ourselves from boredom," said Nigeria midfielder Ogenyi Onazi, who plays for Denizlispor in Turkey. ■



Excess energy: Akwasi Frimpong has been unable to train to his usual standards (Photo: supplied).

How not to handle a pandemic

Aanu Adeoye, Simon Allison,
Amindeh Blaise and Abdul Brima

Graphic: John McCann



At the World Health Organisation's African headquarters, in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, staffers have been quietly impressed with how most African countries have responded to the pandemic. Although resources are scarce and capacity is a problem, the majority of leaders on the continent have taken difficult, proactive decisions to contain the spread of Covid-19, and are listening carefully to scientists and public health experts. Most, but not all.

There is a short list of countries that the WHO is especially worried about. Insiders say that this list includes Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Eritrea. Madagascar, South Sudan, Somalia and Zimbabwe are also countries of concern. The list is topped, however, by Tanzania.

"We are observing some countries take an approach to the response which is not quite what we are recommending. So certainly in Tanzania, we have observed that the physical distancing, including the prohibition of mass gatherings, took some time to happen," said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO's Africa head, at her weekly press briefing on Thursday. "We believe these were probably factors in expanding the number of cases. We are seeing a rapid increase in cases there."

Tanzania's Ministry of Health did not respond to a request for comment.



No direction: what would Magufuli do? The answer, say his critics, is not much (Photo: STR/AFP via Getty Images)

Dr Moeti was being diplomatic. Tanzania only shut its air space to international commercial flights on 14 April - nearly three weeks after Kenya had done so. And the president has refused to place major cities like Dar es Salaam, population 6 million-plus, on any kind of lockdown, saying that the economic damage would be too great. “So, you want me to order vehicles to stop transporting rice and potatoes to the city? You want me to direct all women selling fabric materials to close shop and go home? I won’t lock down Dar es Salaam, never,” the president said in a briefing from Chato on Wednesday.

At the same time, he warned that imported face masks may be “laced with coronavirus” and said that fumigation does nothing to kill the virus. There is no proof for either of these assertions.

Missing in action

But Magufuli himself has been conspicuous by his absence from both Dar es Salaam and the capital city, Dodoma. Wednesday’s press briefing was broadcast from his home village of Chato, where he has been staying for the past few weeks. He has only been seen in public attending church, where he told citizens that the virus could be defeated by prayer alone - and urged worshippers of all faiths to keep attending religious institutions.

“We are not closing places of worship. That’s where there is true healing. Corona is the devil and it cannot survive in the body of Jesus,” he said last month. This puts Magufuli, a Catholic, at odds with Pope Francis, who held Easter Mass in a deserted St Peter’s Basilica and has urged the faithful to stay at home.

Meanwhile, confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Tanzania have surged. In the week of 14 April to 21 April, the caseload quadrupled to 284 cases,

including ten deaths.

“It’s a disaster that’s waiting to happen. It’s heartbreaking for me,” said Fatma Karume, a prominent lawyer and outspoken critic of Magufuli’s response to the pandemic. She wants the president to take decisive action to contain the virus, and measures to mitigate the inevitable economic impact.

In the absence of this leadership, however, many Tanzanians are taking on the pandemic themselves. “You know, I’m really proud of people in Dar es Salaam,” said Karuma. “They are covering themselves, they are taking care of themselves. In every shop, they are making sure there is water and sanitiser before you go in. The general public have done a lot to try and mitigate. But unfortunately the government has not stepped up to the mark, and there is fear, because obviously there is distrust of government numbers.” Amnesty International has criticised the government for silencing and censoring journalists for reporting on the disease.

It’s not just the general public who are defying the president’s inaction, but also members of his own government. Dar es Salaam Regional Commissioner Paul Makonda, after initially downplaying the threat, has ordered his constituents to wear face masks and observe social distancing principles. Other senior officials are trying to work around the president.

“But everyone’s scared to take the larger measures. It’s very difficult when the top guy needs to approve all the decisions, and he is basically missing in action,” said one senior civil society activist, who asked not to be named. “This is a complete case study of how authoritarianism has paralysed an entire system into doing nothing.”

Rashid Abdi, an independent political analyst, said: “Tanzania’s problem stems from the top, when you have a government that is not entirely sold on the science. You also have a very evangelical president, who wants to be seen as the protector of the faith.”

Follow the data

Magufuli’s passive albeit prayerful approach is mirrored in neighbouring Burundi. “Burundi is an exception because it is a country that has put God first,” said a spokesman for President Pierre Nkurunziza. Although international arrivals are being quarantined, there is little to no testing,

The general public have done a lot to try and mitigate. But the government has not stepped up to the mark.

and reliable information about the spread of the virus is scarce. Just 12 cases have been officially recorded in Burundi. Across the border, in similarly-sized Rwanda, there are 176 cases.

Burundi, like Tanzania, is scheduled to have presidential elections in 2020; although unlike Magufuli, Nkurunziza is not eligible to take part.

Cameroon, too, seems to be reading from the same playbook. President Paul Biya has not addressed the nation since the first Covid-19



Other priorities: Pierre Nkurunziza (painted on the gourd) is insisting that presidential elections scheduled for May 2020 will still take place (Photo: STR/AFP via Getty Images)

case in the country was confirmed on 6 March. Limited measures, such as mandatory face mask wearing, have been put in place, but no stimulus has been announced. Health minister Dr Manaouda Malachie has said he will no longer give daily updates, but instead will focus only on positive developments being made - even as confirmed cases climbed to 1,403. And aid workers are blocked from accessing parts of the country where the government is fighting a civil war against Anglophone separatists.

The problems in Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of Congo - the other two countries on the WHO's watch list - are a little different. In Eritrea, President Isaias Afwerki has

likened the fight against the pandemic to a "sudden war" and placed the country under lockdown, but has refused calls to release thousands of political prisoners held in dirty, overcrowded prisons - perfect breeding grounds for the virus. Thirty-nine cases have so far been confirmed.

And in DRC, with 416 cases, fears centre on the government's ability to enforce any kind of emergency measures in such a large, sprawling country. Recent history suggests that there is very little trust in the state when it comes to diseases: this is partly why it has been so difficult to eradicate the latest Ebola outbreak in the north-east of the country.

Speaking about the countries that are failing to take WHO's advice, Dr Moeti said: "What I can say is that we continue to urge these governments to follow the data, to be evidence-based in the measures that they are taking, and to work with partners who are willing to support the impact mitigation measures that we recognise can be very important." ■



SO, YOU THINK YOU'RE A REAL PAN-AFRICAN?

Take this quiz to find out how well you really know our continent.

- 1** What is Africa's northernmost capital city?
- 2** By area, is Africa mainly in the northern or the southern hemisphere?
- 3** Who is the only woman to have been First Lady of two different countries?
- 4** Which African president was formerly a radio DJ?
- 5** South Africa entirely surrounds which country?
- 6** Liberia's capital is Monrovia. Who is it named after?
- 7** Engineers from which country built the African Renaissance Monument in Dakar?
- 8** The kwacha is the currency of which two countries?
- 9** Who is the only human to have run a marathon in under two hours?
- 10** The Congo River flows into which ocean?
- 11** Who was the most recent winner of

the Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership?

- 12** In three months, by how many times does a swarm of breeding locusts increase in size?

How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we will send you the answers immediately.

0-4

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

5-8

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

9-12

"I am the African Renaissance."


 fact

CHECK

Should I wear a face mask?

Petrie Jansen van Vuuren

The available research suggests that cloth masks – store-bought or home-made – have a role to play in slowing the spread of the new coronavirus. At worst, they seem to be slightly less effective than surgical masks. At best, they could dramatically outperform surgical masks.

Even a basic mask with gaps, such as one made from a tea towel, will reduce the amount of virus an infected person sheds. By catching some of the droplets expelled when coughing, sneezing or talking, it will help protect the community.

South Africa's health department says that the mask must cover both the nose and face. Avoid touching it and do not lower it to talk. Make or buy two masks, so you can wear one while the other is being washed.

If you wear a mask outside, you must remove it safely when you get home. First, wash your hands. Avoid touching the part of the mask that covers your face while you undo any elastic, straps or knots. Remove the mask by holding it by the straps. Once it's removed, wash your hands again.

Question: How should cloth masks be disinfected for reuse?

The US Centers for Disease Control advises disinfecting used cloth masks in the washing machine. If you don't have a washing machine, disinfect the mask by putting it in boiling water for about a minute. This will deactivate any virus on it, but repeated boiling will wear out the mask.

Ironing your cloth mask exposes it to temperatures of 180 to 220 degrees Celsius. Extreme heat destroys any virus in under a minute. But how repeated ironing may affect filtration is yet to be determined.

Not all disinfection methods are safe for the filtration capabilities of a mask. Some methods can damage the fine interweaving mesh of fibres. Soaking masks in 75% alcohol and drying, or chlorine- or bleach-based disinfection, significantly reduced the filtration capabilities of a cotton mask. ■

This is an edited version of a report written by Africa Check, a non-partisan fact-checking organisation. View the original report on their website: <https://bit.ly/AfricaCheckMasks>



Madagascar's miracle 'cure'

Aanu Adeoye

Madagascar's President Andry Rajoelina claims to have found the cure to Covid-19 - and he's giving it out for free to his country's most vulnerable.

Speaking on April 19 at an event in Antananarivo, the nation's capital, Rajoelina introduced "Covid-Organic", a bottled drink made from a mixture of artemisia and locally-sourced herbs. Artemisia is a plant proven to be an effective treatment against malaria, but its use is not recommended by the World Health Organisation.

In front of the watching audience, Rajoelina took a swig and said: "I will be the first to drink this today, in front of you, to show you that this product cures and does not kill." Later, in a video call with Felix Tshisekedi, Rajoelina touted his "cure" to the Congolese president.

Snake oil: Madagascar's president samples "Covid-Organic". There is no proof that this drink can combat Covid-19 (Photo: Rijasolo for AFP)

Rajoelina was convinced of Artemisia's efficacy by a letter from Lucile Cornet-Vernet, founder of La Maison de l'Artemisia, a Paris-based NGO promoting the use of the plant artemisia to combat malaria, according to The Africa Report.

Covid-Organic may not kill, but there is no proof whatsoever that it offers any defence against Covid-19.

The Malagasy Institute of Applied Research, which developed the mixture, is yet to make its process publicly available for peer reviews. And the World Health Organisation continues to warn against any reported cures for the disease, although clinical trials are ongoing in different places.

It said in a statement: "While some western, traditional or home remedies may provide comfort and alleviate symptoms of Covid-19, there is no evidence that current medicine can prevent or cure the disease. WHO does not recommend self-medication with any medicines, including antibiotics, as a prevention or cure for Covid-19."

It appears that President Rajoelina did not receive the WHO message. ■

Aanu Adeoye is a media fellow with Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung



Respite: A group counselling session in Bangui, Central African Republic
(Photo: Will Baxter)

The pandemic will affect the mental health of all these groups

Olayinka Omigbodun and Jibril Abdulmalik

Across the world, the coronavirus pandemic is having a huge impact on people's mental health. Whether affected directly by the virus or indirectly through the response to it, the mental

wellbeing of several different groups is being affected in different ways. Here are some of them.

Those who catch the coronavirus are at a higher risk of developing disorders such as anxiety, depression and other mental disorders. Going into intensive care may be traumatic and lead to acute stress or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Those with existing mental illnesses may be unable to access care and get prescription refills as hospitals reduce to only running skeletal and emergency services.

Healthcare workers know the risk to health systems and themselves. Protective personal equipment and

running water in many hospitals is scarce, adding to anxiety and low morale.

Those under quarantine often must stay in basic and unfamiliar accommodation without knowing if they have the virus or not.

Poor people are particularly affected by lockdowns. They are more likely to live in cramped conditions, struggle to buy necessities, and face social challenges such as high rates of domestic violence and crime.

Children and adolescents may struggle without being able to attend school. Going to school is usually a positive factor in promoting students' mental health.

Anxious onlookers worrying about community spread have sometimes turned to psychoactive substances, sleeping pills and anti-anxiety drugs to calm their nerves. Fake news is making matters worse.

Those who have lost their communities by not being able to attend religious and social gatherings have lost a key way to share their burdens and mitigate stress.

Those who have lost their livelihoods due to restrictions and

lockdowns may be driven to despair, especially with uncertainty over when the current situation will end.

What can be done?

It is essential that governments include mental health responses in their plans to address the pandemic. Much needs to be done.

Patients who have recovered must be followed up with. Mental health services must be maintained as far as possible and phone systems instituted. Frontline workers must be supported.

Governments and media should broadcast messages about mental health. Strategies for coping with self-isolation should be disseminated.

Individuals, communities and religious groups should be encouraged to reach out to each other. And helplines should be provided for all.

The pandemic will affect the mental health of many different communities in Africa now and in the aftermath. Responses to the crisis must include strategies to address each at-risk group.



This was first published on African Arguments. View original here: <https://bit.ly/AAmentalhealth>

Covid-19: the latest numbers

Globally, there have been a total of **2,686,785** confirmed cases of Covid-19, says the World Health Organisation. This includes **184,681** deaths. The Africa Centres for Disease Control says that of these, **29,053** cases and **1,331** deaths have occurred in Africa. South Africa is the most affected country in Africa, with **4,220** cases, followed by Egypt with **4,092**. Numbers accurate as of 25 April.

South Africa's massive stimulus plan

President Cyril Ramaphosa's \$26.3 billion economic package offers a new deal for desperate South Africans across the class divide. Thando Maeko and Tshegofatso Mathe

President Cyril Ramaphosa's "radical" new economic plan has found favour with many business and political leaders who have identified the coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to fundamentally change the economy and create greater equality.

"This is a crisis that we must take full advantage of and not allow to go to waste," said Black Business Council president Sandile Zungu in response to the address.

In announcing R500-billion (\$26.3 billion) worth of economic spending and loans, Ramaphosa on Tuesday allocated the bulk of the funding towards propping up businesses, subsidising wages and creating new jobs. He talked about a "new social compact" in the clearest indication yet that Covid-19 money will speed up government spending on service delivery, while trying to keep businesses afloat.

Ramaphosa had been under pressure to do something about the economic effects of the national lockdown, now into its fourth week. The cost of this has been estimated at R14-billion (\$740 million) a day.

His answer was an "extraordinary coronavirus budget" that gave R20-billion (\$1 billion) for the immediate healthcare response — which he called the main concern — and found R130-billion (\$6.8 billion) inside the country, from entities such as the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), as well as promised funds from international financial institutions.

R40-billion (\$2.1 billion) has also been set aside for income support for workers whose employers are unable to pay their staff. A further R100-billion (\$5.3 billion) will be set aside for the protection of jobs, as well as to create jobs. ■

The cost of the effects of the national lockdown has been estimated at R14-billion a day

Investigation

Angolan elites built a private banking network to move their riches to the EU. This is how.

Khadija Sharife and Mark Anderson



A group of Angolan government officials and senior bank executives funnelled hundreds of millions of dollars out of the country with little oversight, creating their own private banking network. Through this, they sent the money to Portugal and elsewhere in the European Union, an investigation by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project has found.

The network sent at least \$324 million through its banks, with most of the

funds originating in Angola. In addition, \$257 million was found to be held by European companies closely affiliated with these officials.

The scheme was documented in 2016 by Portuguese regulators in two audit reports, which have not previously been made public. In the reports, the banks that were established and used by the group were described as having violated dozens of Portuguese banking regulations. The audit findings were

brought to the attention of Portuguese and European Union officials but the secretive financial network still functions today.

Two men who worked closely with former Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos, who left office in 2017 under a shroud of corruption allegations, appeared to be the system's architects: former Vice President Manuel Vicente and his business partner Leopoldino Fragoso do Nascimento, better known as Dino.

More than a dozen influential officials and their family members have used the system. Much of the elite group's wealth

has been tied to Sonangol, Angola's state oil company and the source of at least 75 percent of the country's public revenues.

"Under Vicente, Sonangol went from being a fairly-focused oil company to becoming a constellation of more than 70 joint ventures and subsidiaries operating on four continents, really a maze of interests based on oil but massively extending beyond the oil sector," said Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, a professor of African politics at the University of Oxford and an expert on Angola's banking sector.

Money was also skimmed from other public sources, including reportedly more than \$150 million in loans from Angola's central bank that were never repaid.

The money pipeline started in Angola, where political connections allowed the

elites to escape the scrutiny of regulators. The group exerted control over some of the country's largest lenders, including Banco Africano de Investimentos (BAI), Banco de Negocios Internacional (BNI), and Banco Privado Atlantico (BPA).

The Angolan elites then extended the pipeline by setting up foreign branches of BNI and BPA, and effectively becoming both shareholders and clients of these banks. This allowed them to transfer vast sums of money through a private banking network with little scrutiny.

The foreign branches — two in Portugal and one in Cape Verde — did not implement standard anti-money laundering and terrorist financing controls and failed to carry out any due diligence on clients tagged as suspicious by international regulators. The banks had very few other customers, often making little money or even operating at a loss, suggesting that profitability was not their primary purpose.

The fact that Angolan elites were able to send hundreds of millions through their network — and that it continues to operate despite the damning Portuguese audits — has raised serious questions about the ability, or willingness, of Portugal and the EU to stop illicit financial flows. ■

This investigation by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project has been edited for length. The full version is available on <https://bit.ly/AngolaBanking>

The foreign branches did not implement standard anti-money laundering controls.



The Big Picture

Clean sweep: While most Kenyans are at home during the dusk-to-dawn curfew imposed by the Kenyan government, the streets and the stalls at Parklands City Park Market in Nairobi are being fumigated and disinfected. The intensive sanitation effort is being conducted by an NGO working with county officials, in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (Photo: Luis Tato for AFP)

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