



« IMAGINING THE WORLD TO COME - IMAGINER LE MONDE À VENIR » HOW DOES AFRICA ENVISION COVID AND ITS AFTERMATH?

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2pm – 4:30pm (UTC+2)

BACKGROUND

It is too early to assess the full impact of the COVID-19 global health crisis on African societies and their futures. According to the daily statistics published on the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa appears to be the continent least affected by the virus compared to the rest of the world. However, as stated by some 20 African intellectuals (cf. Jeune Afrique, 10 April 2020), the African continent is facing the harsh effects of the crisis, as infection rates are increasing and essential social and economic activities are significantly disrupted. Voices are rising everywhere, including from youth and women, to warn African leaders and the international community about the pandemic's disastrous consequences on the future of Africa and its capacity to remain resilient. The time has thus come to think about what will happen to the African continent in the aftermath of this crisis.

For the whole of humanity, and even more so for the African continent, the COVID-19 pandemic is more than a health crisis. Affecting societies and cultures at their core, and perhaps the very essence of humankind in their existence as social beings, the pandemic clearly conveys the symptoms of "social disruption". In Africa, notably, communities and social institutions remain deeply rooted in the traditional values of social solidarity and human proximity that underpin living together and the sense of sharing. The COVID-19 pandemic, by brutally imposing unprecedented norms (among which, the so-called "social distancing" and confinement), has led to an unprecedented magnitude of disruption, dysfunction or even social, economic and cultural breakdown, in people's daily lives and in the socialization rituals of African people.

Undoubtedly, this crisis is accelerating and questioning the history of humanity and of the African continent. It paves the way to new currents of thoughts and a new paradigm for development. Africa after COVID-19 will have to be different, globally and in its geopolitical, economic, social and cultural specificities. A new way of viewing African development and governance will need to emerge from the aftermath of this crisis, so as to provide the long-awaited responses from the continent itself. Like any other crisis, the one we are experiencing today far exceeds all that the continent has experienced to date and demands an individual and collective awareness of what Africa's common future will be. This is probably where Africans, of all conditions and generations, need to show their ability to:

- Rethink Africa by being active citizens of their own history;
- Reassess their ambition to emerge, understood as a structural transformation not only of economies, but also of societies and mentalities; and,
- Reformat their strategies and models for development and governance.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

In order to give substance to its vision and functions as a laboratory of ideas and capacity builder, UNESCO aims to contribute to understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions of the crisis as well as to the post-pandemic reconstruction of society in Africa. This meeting, organized in the framework of **UNESCO's Priority Africa programme** and the initiative **"Imagining the World to Come"**, will bring together a group of leading African intellectuals and actors in African social, economic and cultural life. The main objective is to initiate an African, multidisciplinary and future-oriented reflection on the impact of this crisis on the continent and rethink the Africa we want, drawing, inter alia, on the expertise and methodological approaches of different disciplines (philosophy, sociology, history, political science, ethics, psychology, or geography.) This is the first step towards generating and stimulating ideas from Africans, to complement the massive global public health responses currently being deployed in the fight against COVID-19 in Africa.

This debate, the first in a series, is part of a wider, comprehensive UNESCO initiative to establish a global dialogue on the future of humanity after COVID-19.

The participants will reflect on the following two main issues:

1. What main lessons can we draw for Africa from this crisis and the major challenges it poses for the future of the African continent?
2. What lines of thinking should be further explored towards renewal/change of the current paradigms of development in Africa? How can international institutions such as UNESCO and its partners contribute to this renewal of African development thinking?

A synthesis of the debates will be published and shared as widely as possible through UNESCO's networks, its partners and through social media. The results of this reflection and the thematic debates that will follow will feed into the global initiative "Imagining the world to come".