



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

Thursday, May 7, 2020

SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

- In order to give substance to its vision and functions as a laboratory of ideas and capacity builder, UNESCO aims to contribute, through this debate, to the 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", brought together a group of leading African intellectuals and actors in African social, economic and cultural life. The main objective was 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 was the first step towards generating and stimulating ideas from Africans of the continent and Diaspora, to complement the massive global public health responses currently 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 post COVID-19.
- The participants reflected 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?
- The quality of the participants contributed to the richness and the high level of the debate. The participants expressed ideas of high relevance in relation to the current COVID-19 crisis and made substantial proposals for the future. The interventions showed that the social phenomenon of COVID-19 will not leave intact any area of life, including that of reflection. As Unesco Director-General Audrey Azoulay said in her introduction, "The shock caused by the COVID-19 crisis is global and containment currently offers a pause in our lives that allows for a space for reflection and foresight."
- After the "staggering effect" of the crisis, which has revealed the fragility of health systems in Africa and in the rest of the world, the first conclusion is that of a global and multidimensional crisis whose scale, virulence and quick dissemination have taken the entire planet by surprise from North to South and from East to West. Mr. Kwesi Quartey, Vice-President of the African Union Commission, said in his opening remarks that "it is not an African or European problem, it is an issue that affects everyone and we must all work together as one in order to find solutions to this multidimensional crisis".

Current issues and major challenges of COVID-19 for Africa

- One of the main challenges will be to imagine to imagine what the world of tomorrow will look like? the face of the world of tomorrow. The COVID-19 crisis offers Africa a unique opportunity to invent its own future. A future that is part of the time of the world. The pandemic confirms that African concerns and perspectives are global and vice versa. We must have the courage to accelerate the integration of Africa because there is no other option than working together as one. We must have the courage to re-invent a new humanity, which is plural and based on a new vital humanism (reference to the UBUNTU, African philosophy: "I am because we are; because we are, so I am").

- This is a major crisis encompassing a health, social and even a political crisis. The pandemic affects all aspects of social life. It increases already glaring inequalities, undermining African cultural values and norms. It leads to an increase in gender-based violence, further exacerbating the exploitation and marginalization of women and girls. The violent vertigo induced by COVID-19, its behavioral imperatives, its disciplinary requirements have revealed the multiple vulnerabilities of African societies. Gender inequalities and generational inequalities have become more acute.
- A spontaneous response to the crisis has been the development of remote learning in Africa. This is a good opportunity to restore the educational systems and to ensure the continuity of education. Africa needs to learn from this to invest heavily in new technologies. It may also be an opportunity to undertake a restructuring of entire educational systems, whose aims should be to promote multilingual, mother-tongue-based education, which no longer produce “formatted citizens” who replicate socio-economic models that have already failed.
- Research and innovation are one of the challenges posed by the crisis. Africa consumes neither its knowledge nor its science. It does possess however the essence of world science. No global industry can do without Africa's raw materials.
- The crisis also affects economic life. It raises the issue of growth and the relationship between man and nature. It introduces the concept of “decarbonisation” of growth and the need for an ecological transition. The African socio-economic context is an opportunity for the continent to reinvent itself. From a social point of view, there is a need to work on aspects of social protection, taking into account the great informality of work in Africa. From an economic point of view, there is an urgent need to promote the priorities set by the AU, in terms of productive transformation and regional integration, namely, priority for innovation policies, young people, digitization and environmental protection. Similarly, the cancellation of Africa's debt, for example, would refocus the notion of development and the notion of vital humanism (Ubuntu).
- The pandemic further questions the relationship between the state and society. It undermines the foundations of public institutions and democratic processes. It has even brought to the fore the question of society's participation in public life (“participatory democracy”) and what it means to be a citizen, in a context where the state does not has enough capacity to deliver and provide effective responses to citizens' demands (such as security, basic social services). It is necessary to understand the current tension between imposition of state of emergencies and other measures including social distancing and lockdowns adopted by African governments, on the one hand, and the response of citizens in the form of popular demonstrations against those measures, on the other, in a historical context. These tensions underscore the failure of African countries to address structural problems that have underpinned inequalities and produced the conditions for conflicts and sociopolitical upheavals, for decades, dating back to the 1980s. These structural challenges include, but are not limited to poverty, hunger, unemployment, dysfunctional educational systems, and above all lack of access to decent healthcare facilities and systems.
- The crisis of state-society-citizenship relations also speak to decades of failed implementation of structural adjustment policies and programmes imposed on African countries in the 1980s and 90s, by the Bretton Woods Institutions. At the heart of this, it questions the relevance of the neoliberal international order that has dominated the world for the last several decades, and more importantly had negative impact on Africa's development.
- Africa is a continent where young people make up the vast majority of the population. African youth are therefore an asset for the development of the continent, including for this health crisis. Given that, this demographic group is probably the most affected by the socio-economic effects of the pandemic (loss of jobs and income, out-of-schooling, etc.), it is therefore important to take into account their

commitment and to actively involve them both in preventing the spread of the virus and in the fight against the pandemic.

- The crisis also raises questions about how Africans should think and imagine the future. Are the conventional methods of foresight still relevant? Are they still relevant to provide elements to think about the future of a world subject to “contradictory uncertainties”? COVID-19 will definitively have an impact on the global epistemological order. The time of the pandemic opens a new era to re-imagine Africa and think differently about its future and that of the world.
- One final observation: the "expected" disaster has not (yet) taken place in Africa and the crisis has strengthened African resilience and revealed many treasures of innovation. In this respect, however, Africa is not an exception (both in terms of responses to the crisis and in terms of the innovative solutions that have emerged on the continent).

Proposals for the future

Continuing the global reflection on Africa’s future

- The COVID-19 crisis offers an opportunity to rethink many aspects of life in societies in Africa and in the rest of the world. It offers an opportunity to rethink current assumptions about development paradigms embraced by African states, with a view to lay fresh foundations for the future; there is a need to rethink the neoliberal international order, in light of the current crisis.
- The crisis also calls for a reorientation of national and regional priorities in Africa. This is an opportunity to focus on human-centered priorities, and invest primarily in education, healthcare and scientific research as the basis for creating a new Africa, one that is capable of looking inward and finding endogenous solutions to its problems, but also ensuring that it strengthens its place on the international scene.
- This pandemic offers the opportunity to rethink the development of the continent with full awareness of the intrinsic link between the economy, security, culture and ecology. Africa should break with conventional ideas, often dictated from the outside, and highlight endogenous perspectives in its development devices, strategies and actions.
- Thinking of a new world, another way of doing humanity, engaging in human-centered actions, promoting a new humanism are all avenues on which reflection should be undertaken.

Supporting African Youth

- Youth, the overwhelming majority of the African population, must be educated and empowered to emerge from despair and face the future.
- Investing in the young people of Africa is a way to invest in the future of Africa. African countries should explore the innovative capacities of the youth, demonstrated in diverse ways during the current pandemic. An effort should thus be made to document all the new/innovative ideas put forward by young Africans, and ensure those ideas become part of the reconstruction and recovery phase.
- With reference to innovation, it has to be noted that know-how and knowledge are global but innovation is local and it is up to Africans to adapt and be innovative and, for this, it is essential to train young people for the future. African universities such as the UM6P (University Mohamed VI Polytechnic of Benguerir), which cooperates with UNESCO (through the project "Imagine the Futures of Africa") is a good example of a successful transition to comprehensive digital education.
- Containment has created a climate of fear and many young people have lost their jobs. Young people need more decent and skilled jobs. They need reassurance so that they can have hope, ambitions and

participate in the reconstruction of their countries. One solution would be to encourage private and telecom companies to make internet access cheaper and more accessible to all. This would allow young people to develop innovative projects to combat COVID-19. We must insist on youth and innovation, invite young people to dialogue and give them resources and investment opportunities.

The role of International Institutions

- The role of international institutions in Africa is essential to combating the pandemic, to engage in a deep reflection on its causes and consequences, and to plan solutions for the future. In this regard, UNESCO and its partners are able to offer platforms for dialogue on which researchers, practitioners and policy-makers can meet to reflect together on how Africa should collectively position itself in this new post-COVID world order that brings about more effective and balanced multilateralism.
 - UNESCO's role in particular, is critical in supporting Africa move forward. Among others, UNESCO, in collaboration with its partners, should continue to play the role of a catalyst that can mobilize relevant knowledge to assist Africa make a transition from the current emergency to a post pandemic recovery. The quality of high-level intellectuals assembled during this debate clearly testifies to UNESCO's capacity to assist in mobilizing the required human resources that can truly contribute positively to Africa's future.
 - Innovation and research are among the areas that need particular attention. International institutions could help African countries invest more in research and make an inventory of innovative and practical solutions to the crisis. Similarly, it is worth thinking about the need to develop African co-innovation and support entrepreneurs as main entry points for this new Africa. We see that there is a very strong relationship between innovation and social change to come. Therefore, investing in research and innovation is a survival imperative.
 - International institutions should accompany Africa so that the continent can cope with the health, security and social consequences of the pandemic and ensure that the COVID-19 crisis can inspire the structural transformation of societies, imaginations and mentalities and finally create the preconditions for the emergence of an Africa reconciled with itself.
 - In the African context, upholding the principles of the UBUNTU, MAYA or NITEE (which from the South to the North and from the East to the West of the continent put Humans at the heart of humanity) prove to be extremely useful at this critical juncture in the continent's history.
 - In this regard, it is critically important to build a true African Union, a union of not only governments, but also one that brings African peoples together in unity, and explore their diverse potentials. We can no longer act in a disorderly manner; we must act together with an African Union at the service of the African people.
 - UNESCO, through its functions as a laboratory of ideas and capacity builder, should continue, together with its partners, the organization of other thematic webinars in relation to the current crisis and its impact (e.g. Youth, Citizenship, Research/innovation in Africa...) with the view to explore all possibilities for deepening this reflection.
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AGENDA

2:00 pm – 2:25 pm

Opening session

Moderator : **Mr Firmin Edouard Matoko**, Assistant-Director General for Priority Africa and External Relations, UNESCO

Keynote Speakers : **Ms Audrey Azoulay**, Director-General, UNESCO
Mr Kwesi Quartey, Deputy Chairperson, African Union Commission

2:25 pm – 3:00 pm

Introductory remarks

1. Current issues and major challenges of COVID-19 for Africa
 - **Mr Bachir S. Diagne**, Professor at Columbia University, United States
 - **Mr Karim Elaynaoui**, Managing Director of the Policy Center for the New South, Morocco
 - **Ms Isabel Maria Cortesão Casimiro**, Professor at the Center of African Studies, Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo (Mozambique), Current President of the Council for the Development of Social Sciences Research in Africa (CODESRIA)
 - **Ms Kamina Diallo**, Doctoral student, Sciences Po, Center for International Studies (CERI)
2. Lines of thinking for the future
 - **Mr Adebayo Olukoshi**, Director for Africa and West Asia, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
 - **Ms Natalie Sonia Mukundane**, Executive Chairperson of the African Youth Commission
 - **Ms Boitumelo Kgarebe**, Vice President Southern Africa region, African Academy of Sciences, National Institute for Occupational Health, South Africa
 - **Mr Alioune Sall**, Director of the African Futures Institute (AFI)

3:00 pm – 3:50 pm

Debate

3:50 pm – 4:15 pm

Representatives of institutions

- **Mr Mario Pezzini**, Director of the Development Center of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- **Ms Sandra Coulibaly Leroy**, Assistant-Director for the Division of Monitoring, Analysis and Forecasting of the International Organization of Francophonie (OIF)
- **Mr Hicham El Habti**, Secretary General of the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Benguerir, Morocco
- **Mr Mihoub Mezouaghi**, Director of the French Development Agency (AFD) in Morocco, Former member of the Board of Directors of the AFD in Paris

4:15 pm – 4:30 pm

Synthesis of the debate

Marema Toure Thiam, Chief of Section, Sector for Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO Regional Office for West Africa-Sahel, Dakar, Senegal

Lamin Abdul Rahman, Programme Specialist, Sector for Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO

Concluding remarks

F. E. Matoko, Assistant-Director General for Priority Africa and External Relations, UNESCO

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS (Alphabetical order)

1. **Ms. Ache Coelo (Chad)**, Sociologist, Art Director, Member of Conseil Pr sidentiel pour l'Afrique (CPA)
2. **Ms. Isabel Maria Cortes o Casimiro (Mozambique)**, Sociologist, Professor at the Center of African Studies, Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo (Mozambique), Current President of the Council for the Development of Social Sciences Research in Africa (CODESRIA)
3. **Ms. Sandra Coulibaly Leroy**, Deputy Director, Division of Monitoring, Analysis and Forecasting, *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF)
4. **Mr. Bachir S. Diagne (Senegal)**, Philosopher, Professor, Columbia University, United States
5. **Ms. Kamina Diallo (Gabon – Republic of Guinea)**, Doctoral student, *Sciences Po Paris*, Center for International Studies (CERI)
6. **Mr. Philippe Durance (France)**, Professor, Innovation Department, National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts (*Conservatoire national des Arts et M tiers*)
7. **Mr. Karim Elaynaoui (Morocco)**, Economist, Director, Policy Center for the New South
8. **Mr. Hicham El Habti**, Secretary-General, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Benguerir
9. **Ms. Fadwa Gmiden (Tunisia)**, Vice-President, Pan-African Youth Network for the Culture of Peace (PAYNCOP)
10. **Ms. Fabienne Goux-Baudiment (France)**, Academic, President, proGective, Centre for Research in Foresight (*Centre de recherche en prospective*)
11. **Ms. Amy Jadesimi (Nigeria)**, Entrepreneur, CEO, Lagos Deep Offshore Logistics Base (LADOL)
12. **Ms. Boitumelo Kgarebe (South Africa)**, Vice President Southern Africa region, African Academy of Sciences, Professor, National Institute for Occupational Health, South Africa
13. **Ms. Nyokase Madise (Malawi)**, Artist and Co-founder, PhilARTthropy Youth Initiative "Arts for Social Change"
14. **Mr. Mihoub Mezouaghi**, Director, French Development Agency (*Agence fran aise de d veloppement* (AFD)/Morocco, Former member of the Board of Directors of AFD in Paris
15. **Mr. Ali Moussa Iye (Djibouti)**, Writer, Political Anthropology Researcher, Founder of Global Africa Initiative
16. **Ms. Natalie Sonia Mukundane (Kenya)**, Executive Chairperson, African Youth Commission (AYC)
17. **Ms. Jane Catherine Ngila (Kenya)**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic Affairs, Professor at Riara University (Nurturing Innovators), Nairobi, Kenya
18. **Mr. Adebayo Olukoshi (Nigeria)**, Political Scientist, Director for Africa and West Asia, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), former Director of the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (UNIDEP)
19. **Mr. Mario Pezzini**, Director, Development Centre, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
20. **Mr. Kwesi Quartey**, Deputy-Chairperson, African Union Commission (AUC)
21. **Mr. Alioune Sall (Senegal)**, Sociologist, Director, African Futures Institute (AFI)
22. **Mr. Ebrima Sall (the Gambia)**, Sociologist, Executive Director, Trust Africa, Former Executive Secretary of CODESRIA
23. **Mr. Adama Samassekou (Mali)**, Former Minister of Education of Mali, Former Executive Secretary of the African Academy of Languages of the African Union (ACALAN/AU), Former President of International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH), President of the World Humanities Forum
24. **Ms. Alinah K. Segobye (Namibia)**, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Namibia University of Science and Technology
25. **Ms. Dzodzi Tsikata (Ghana)**, Sociologist, Professor, University of Ghana, Director of the Institute of African Studies, Former President of CODESRIA
26. **Mr. Martial Ze Belinga (Cameroon)**, Economist and Sociologist, Member of the International Scientific Committee of UNESCO's General History of Africa

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