African Parliamentary Union

43rd Conference
Djibouti, 14 – 15 October 2021

R /150/43 (2021)

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on African populations: resilience and challenges

Resolution adopted by the 43rd Conference
(Djibouti, 15 October 2021)

The African Parliamentary Union, meeting at its 43rd Conference in Djibouti on 14 and 15 October 2021,

Considering that the COVID-19-related health crisis is compelling African countries to review their public policies in various areas,

Indicating that although the COVID-19 pandemic has created significant challenges for the people of the African continent, other issues such as insecurity, climate change, terrorism and violent extremism remain and, in some cases, have had a more devastating impact on them than the virus,

Aware that this pandemic will have an impact on the well-being of African populations, which will decrease by 10 points according to the World Bank, resulting in a drop in their income, particularly for the populations of the informal sector, which accounts for 80% of the continent's workers; the African Union estimates that this pandemic will result in the loss of nearly 20 million jobs,

Convinced that the pandemic will undermine the primary objective of the Sustainable Development Goals which is to reduce poverty,

Considering that this health crisis may change the relationship between non-State actors and civil society on the one hand, and governments on the other; indeed, cooperation with non-State governance systems may be essential to ensure an effective response to the crisis,

Noting that this COVID-19 pandemic, which has taken a heavy toll on all African countries, is amplified by the security crisis in countries experiencing socio-political tensions or armed conflicts,

Convinced that this health crisis is likely to revive existing tensions, which could be exploited by armed groups and also lead to xenophobic violence,

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Aware that the human impact of these disturbances can be very heavy when the populations of the areas concerned are in a situation of high insecurity,

Noting that populations in some African countries remain highly vulnerable to shocks such as this COVID-19 pandemic, as, despite efforts to invest in basic health services, health coverage levels fall short of meeting the high poverty levels,

Recalling that health systems in some countries are already fragile and, in most cases, geared towards treating diseases such as HIV, malaria and tuberculosis,

Stressing the low capacity of most African countries to invest in long-term social plans, making it difficult to implement crisis management plans; governments are often faced with difficult, if not impossible, budgetary choices between security, health and food emergencies,

Noting that the closure of borders and movement restrictions have led to disruptions in market supplies, which has worsened the situation of farmers who can no longer sell their produce in neighbouring foreign markets,

Recognizing that migration is a key factor in food systems in African countries, particularly in the Sahel region, and that mobility restrictions hamper the availability of agricultural labour,

Stressing the need to maintain a minimum movement of goods and people to avoid strangling local economies in countries heavily dependent on the informal economy,

Recognizing that the food crisis in conflict and hard-to-reach areas has worsened food insecurity and malnutrition and led to massive population displacements, further complicating the supply by humanitarian organizations,

Indicating that the decrease in remittances from the African Diaspora will further exacerbate this decline in income; these remittances are estimated by the World Bank to amount to US$48 billion in 2019, i.e., more than the estimated $26.4 billion in official development assistance to the African continent,

Convinced that in many African countries social safety nets are an important tool for food and nutrition security, poverty reduction and resilience of the most vulnerable populations,

1. *Affirms* that it is becoming increasingly vital to consider long-term solutions, through public policies that would allow African governments to be the main drivers of a crisis such as COVID-19;

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2.   *Recommends* that, in all efforts to curb the COVID-19 crisis, special attention should be paid to populations in areas affected by the harmful effects of terrorism;

3.   *Also* affirms that the COVID-19 crisis poses immense challenges to policymakers, and can act as a catalyst for setting up a more robust system for substituting imports with local production and, generally, sustainable development strategies;

4.   *Commits* African governments, with the support of development partners, to focus their efforts on promoting and developing traditional plant medicine in combating COVID-19;

5.   *Emphasises* the need to foster greater transparency and governance to improve confidence in the Rule of Law;

6.   *Calls on* African governments to ensure that the health crisis and its consequences do not undermine democratic life;

7.   *Urges* governments to conduct electoral processes in a consultative and inclusive manner in order to mitigate political tensions exacerbated by the health crisis;

8.   *Calls on* African governments to undertake transformative domestic reforms to improve revenue mobilization, develop digitalization, increase trade integration and competition, implement social protection programmes, and mitigate the effects of climate change, thereby promoting resilience, growth, and job creation;

9.   *Recommends* that governments continue to strengthen health systems and expand health and social protection coverage;

10.   *Also recommends* that governments take action to:

a) Improve hospital services and the resilience of the health workforce by allocating substantial financial and budgetary resources to ensure continuity and sustainability of the health service;

b) Have robust health systems through improved access to financial resources;

c) Introduce reforms in the management of public finances in order to cope with the debt burden;

d) Develop the use of digital communication in the health sector and public services in general;

e) Promote regional and sub-regional information exchange on crisis management.

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11. *Calls on* governments to implement policies aimed at eradicating gender-based violence, to support the poorest households that have the greatest difficulty in accessing food, and ensure that children's access to nutritious food is maintained;

12. Emphasizes information exchange between governments on programmes for agricultural development and the fight against food insecurity of the most vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities;

13. *Recommends*, in the area of food security, the adoption of measures to support farmers in increasing agricultural production, which is essential to meeting the needs of local populations, and measures for supporting food supply chains;

14. *Calls on* Governments to further promote the free movement of goods, persons, capital and services, on the one hand, and also to take ownership of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which entered into force in January 2021, while facilitating transhumance in guaranteed conditions of security and in compliance with health arrangements put in place, on the other;

15. *Stresses* the need to strengthen, in the medium and long term, advocacy, policy dialogue and the mobilization of appropriate resources for food security and nutrition, particularly in the areas such as social protection, strategic reserves and food banks;

16. *Further calls on* governments to continue to address the needs of vulnerable children, by striving to curb inequalities caused by distance learning and for their safe return to school;

17. *Encourages*, where necessary, the establishment of safety nets to improve livelihoods through free basic services, in-kind and cash assistance, and financial support for viable businesses;

18. *Urges* governments and economic operators to use information technology as an effective teaching tool in crisis situations;

19. *Urges* governments to disaggregate data on the effects of COVID-19 by gender and age for use in the development of gender-sensitive budgets;

20. *Calls on* financial and development institutions to support farming communities impacted by the pandemic to ensure continuity and resilience of activities to boost agricultural production.

21. *Calls on* these institutions to target their actions on:

a) Promoting secondary, technical and vocational schools for young people from disadvantaged households, and providing health education for primary school children and providing free meals;

b) Providing interest-free loans and grants to women-led SMEs to help them sustain their businesses and increase their resilience;

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c) Facilitating access to essential medical supplies and improving health care systems;

d) Focusing on recovery by helping countries manage the impact of the pandemic on public finances, in the form of budgetary assistance and/or development policy support;

e) Supporting countries in their efforts to maintain essential public services, including nutrition, education, health, water and sanitation;

f) Helping countries to monitor the development of the crisis and respond effectively to it;

22. *Underlines* the need to work more with reputable humanitarian and civil society organizations which provide daily assistance to the most vulnerable populations, thus contributing to strengthening the resilience of the people against the many challenges they face;

23. *Encourages* actions to facilitate humanitarian assistance in conflict areas and refugee camps by establishing intervention modalities to reach these vulnerable communities;

24. *Recommends* the following social, humanitarian and governance measures to African governments:

a) Provide space for civil society through responsible media and democratic participation in national life;

b) Support humanitarian initiatives launched by the international community, both in the fight against COVID-19 and in humanitarian assistance;

c) Ensure that vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced persons, migrants, women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, are not discriminated against and that their needs are met, by including them in national health systems and response plans;

d) Increase efforts to strengthen the resilience, protection and inclusion of displaced populations, including in the areas of employment and education, and their integration into national development planning;

e) Strictly implement strategies to fight corruption and improve transparency in the mobilization and use of development finance resources;

f) Ensure that partner countries have an obligation to support the continent's fight against illicit financial flows and its quest for greater representation and influence in global governance systems;

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25. *Calls on* official bilateral creditors to grant debt relief to the poorest and most vulnerable African countries in order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on their populations;

26. *Also calls on* Western countries to maintain and increase levels of official development assistance (ODA), and to strengthen cooperation to mobilize private capital, and *Urges them* to dedicate for African countries part of the produced anti-covid vaccines;

27. *Urges* major manufacturers of medical supplies to refrain from imposing export bans or other trade policies that penalise African importers and *urges them* to reserve part of the production of anti-covid vaccines for some countries of the continent and to lift the patents;

28. *Affirms* that the response to the health emergency must be integrated into a sustainable development perspective by encouraging efforts to overcome the crisis in a climate of peace;

29. *Urges* the international community and its principal organ, the United Nations, to give their full backing to the African Union's "Silencing the guns" initiative, and to spare no effort to achieve the objective to restore and consolidate peace, including the removal of all obstacles to the sovereign defence of their territories; eradicatingCOVID-19 or combating any other pandemic cannot succeed in a climate of political unrest, insecurity or military tension;

30. *Stresses* the importance of involving African and global actors, in particular the UN Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council, and mobilizing them to drive the peace process on the continent;

31. *Invites* all African Governments to pay particular attention to the relevance of the implementation stage of the above recommendations, so as to achieve their effectiveness;

32. *Decides* to consider at its next meeting, the issue of terrorism and armed conflicts in African countries.

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