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Reflections on Policy and Practice

## Revue des mutations en Afrique

Réflexions sur les politiques et les pratiques

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## **Editorial**

Said Adejumobi

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had deleterious effects on African countries, especially on the State, economy and society. Although the health impact of COVID-19 in Africa has been relatively minimal compared to other regions of the world with higher rates of infection and mortality, it has stretched the continent's ill-equipped health infrastructure to its limits and, more importantly, has disrupted economies, damaged livelihoods, increased poverty and inequality and created serious social and economic dislocations and tensions. For example, the gross domestic product growth rate in Africa contracted by more than 5 per cent in 2020; revenue loss to Governments was between 20 and 30 per cent, amounting to about \$500 billion; exports and imports were estimated to have dropped by 35 per cent from 2019, amounting to \$270 billion; the tourism and travel sector lost about \$50 billion; job losses in both the formal and informal sectors were estimated at about 20 million in 2020; foreign direct investment declined by 15 per cent; and the number of people living in extreme poverty was projected to increase by 32 million in 2020 – a number that may rise to 39 million in 2021. These figures are frightening, and their impact may be drastic and debilitating, possibly rolling back the modest gains made by African countries towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has been at the forefront in intellectual and policy thinking on the COVID-19 pandemic, producing several analytical studies and policy research papers and promoting action to address the challenges of recovering from the crisis.

The collection of papers contained in the present volume of the *Journal of African Transformation* complements the work of ECA on COVID-19 by introducing different perspectives, analyses and intellectual reflections on the pandemic by African scholars and policy practitioners. Presenting a broad scope of knowledge and policy options, the papers are intended to provide

support to African Governments in making the right policy decisions and to assist them in navigating their way out of the crisis. The papers were selected from those submitted for the 2020 African Economic Conference organized by ECA, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. Owing to the pandemic, the Conference was held online. The papers provide perspectives on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the State, economy and society; the dimensions of the challenges; and possible pathways to recovery.

In her article, **Amara Ekeruche** examines the early impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Africa in both the economic and social dimensions. Aside from the health impact, the pandemic has led to an unprecedented disruption in economic activities, including demand, supply and financial shocks. In order to counteract the fall in private sector demand, stabilize the financial system and ensure economic recovery, Governments and central banks across the world have deployed a range of policies and programmes. To provide context to the effects of the crisis and prospects for recovery in Africa, the author analyses prevailing vulnerabilities and strengths that are influencing responses to the pandemic, such as low growth and constrained fiscal space, poor social infrastructure and services, the continent's previous experience in handling pandemics and epidemics and the rise of the role of non-State actors. Furthermore, the mitigation strategies put in place to curb the virus and the policy responses deployed to alleviate the economic impact of the pandemic are examined in detail.

In his article, **Yaya Koloma** focuses on the role of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) within the dynamic economies of Côte d'Ivoire and

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