

COVID-19

The OTHER SOLUTIONS' Newsletter

FOCUS ON AFRICA

SUMMARY

1. As several countries are phasing out of lockdown, political and economic constraints on international travel are expected to remain significant in the near to medium term.
2. The low incidence of Covid - 19 in the Africa is difficult to understand. While testing remains scarce and inadequate to pass judgement on actual spread, there is no observed spike in hospital admissions.
3. This may be related to host of factors, one of them being low exposure at first to the virus through international travel, a second being slow propagation in relation to an average lower population density. A consequence would be a slower spread of the disease, yet to peak.
4. This however does not account for low incidence observed in major urban centers as of writing. Although it may as well be related to low reference rates, this suggests that something distinctive is indeed going on.
5. Political reactions to the virus vary greatly across the continent, ranging from lockdown to social distancing measures. At one end of the spectrum, Burundi is in full campaign mode ahead of elections scheduled May 20 that should name a successor to President Buyoya.
6. Donors' current national priorities, volatility of guidelines or even outright lack of visibility suggest that the survival of small and medium NGOs appears distinctly threatened in the medium term.
7. OSC's ongoing survey suggests a high demand for, firstly, safety and security trainings and, secondly, for stress management trainings.

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Covid Landscape

Note: Readers should keep in mind that most scientific publications that are referenced have not been peer-reviewed yet. While we believe such documents represent solid material to inform decisions, caution is advised.

As of writing, more than 3.7 million people had tested positive for Covid – 19. The official caseload is expected to reach the 4 million mark by May 9th or 10th.

https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/?utm_source=jhu_properties&utm_medium=dig_link&utm_content=ow_jhhomepage&utm_campaign=jh20

The treatment landscape can be found here:

<https://www.covid-nma.com/dataviz/>
Remdesivir, an antiviral drug has been fast tracked for approval by the Food and Drug Administration. Yet, several studies remain ongoing and are yet to provide more conclusive evidence on the drug's effectiveness, which appears to be real but limited.

As a proxy for the overall economic impact of the pandemic, US estimates offer a bleak perspective. The Congressional Budget Office's latest analysis anticipate a 5.6% decrease in GDP output in 2020 followed by a modest growth in 2021 that will compensate only half of incurred losses. Unemployment rates should average 15% in Q2 and Q3 of 2020 and stabilize at 10% for 2021.

<https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2020-04/56344-CBO-presentation.pdf>

Projections for the European Union are broadly similar.

https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/05/06/coronavirus-les-sombres-previsions-economiques-de-la-commission-europeenne_6038832_3234.html

International travel remains severely restricted. By end April, the UN World Tourism Organization estimated that, out of 217 countries, only 16 (8%) had minor travel restrictions in place, imposing self-isolation or a 14-days quarantine. All others have either suspended all entry (45%), banned international travel fully or partially (30%) or are enforcing restrictions based on area of origin (16%). While procedures may change slightly for development and emergency workers as well as human rights defenders, restrictions are expected to last long after lockdowns are phase out.

<https://www.unwto.org/news/covid-19-travel-restrictions>

“Political and economic factors suggest that international travel is likely to remain significantly constrained as the search for a cure, let alone a vaccine, remains at full speed but with limited results so far.”

African perspectives

As of writing, the caseload in Africa stood at under 50,000, i.e. less than 1% of the total burden of disease. This doesn't square easily with the size of Africa, estimated to represent about 16.5% of the world's population. Indeed, as reported by Le Monde, MSF has not seen an increase of Covid – 19 related patients in its health structures in Africa.

https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/05/05/coronavirus-pourquoi-l-afrique-resiste-mieux-que-le-reste-du-monde_6038758_3212.html

<https://africacdc.org/>

In addition to the already quoted piece by Le Monde, Jeune Afrique provides an overview of various hypotheses being circulated to account for the low number of infections in Africa. These include low

population density, low exposure to international travel, a younger demographic profile and climate, to name a few.

<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/937712/societe/coronavirus-decryptage-des-hypotheses-qui-expliqueraient-la-faible-contamination-en-afrique/>

Yet all such hypotheses have significant counterarguments and the piece does not account for the dearth of testing continentwide, as reported by the BBC.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52478344>

Political incentives to minimize the impact of the disease – and thus extol governmental virtues, have been observed worldwide.

https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2020/05/02/enquete-sur-les-morts-invisibles-du-covid-19_6038406_3244.html

There is no reason to believe that African governments be more or less virtuous on that count. In Tanzania, the Presidency has released data on a piecemeal basis. In Burundi, the presidential campaign is in full throttle ahead of election day scheduled May 20 with no reported social distancing measures affecting rallies.

<https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/ea/Burundi-poll-campaigns-in-high-gear-despite-outbreak/4552908-5540224-4wkcoi/index.html>

According to research carried out by AfroBarometer and reported in the Washington Post, a survey over 45,000 participants showed moderate trust in Governments, averaging 46% over 34 countries. This is relevant generally as trust in authorities has been shown to be an important factor in the successful management of epidemics. It also stands in stark contrast with the average 63%

trust religious and traditional leaders enjoy, suggesting a local-driven focus will be indispensable.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/05/01/many-africans-distrust-their-governments-how-will-that-affect-their-coronavirus-response/>

Intercontinental air travel has always been difficult and very expensive. The critical difficulties by the air transportation industry are thus likely to be felt dearly in Africa, with a few exceptions, such as Ethiopian Airlines. The landscape is otherwise pretty bleak, with Governments rushing in to support national airlines (as in Kenya and Burkina Faso). Larger assistance may be expected as Donors support the continent, but this would come after Covid 19 health related issues have been dealt with first. As a consequence, African destinations should remain underserved and quite costly to reach in the foreseeable future.

Lastly, perceptions of foreigners as potential importers of the virus have intensified. Although they do not appear to have materialized in targeted violence, entry restrictions are largely in place throughout the continent. Anecdotally, as a sign of changing times, white foreigners are now called “Corona” and not “Mzungu” in Kenya.

<https://africasacountry.com/2020/05/corona-how-are-you>

“It is thus likely that the burden of disease may only be estimated much later through retrospective mortality surveys trying to gauge excess mortality. Even then, lingering uncertainties about actual prevalence in Africa combined with high costs and barriers to entry are likely to hinder significantly international movement to the continent for some time.”

Donors

The pandemic has magnified national responses and thus impacted development assistance in several ways. As an illustration, USAID recently announced that it would not fund NGOs to procure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) without prior written approval, triggering concerns that material required for urgent health programs may be further hampered.

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/04/29/USAID-bans-masks-and-gloves-NGO-grants?fbclid=IwAR2OrNget3TVMIqU6dYtD3uTIERIwlo9QwOXoGMbC76LCnAQZjb-FisF5Ns>

ECHO's silence in responding to the Covid - 19 pandemic beyond European borders remains puzzling. This may partially be due to ongoing discussions about the 2021 - 2027 budget.

<https://www.devex.com/news/eu-humanitarian-boss-says-covid-19-warrants-aid-budget-rethink-97059>

Over the Easter weekend, DFID announced it would be contributing £200 million to fight Covid -19 in low-income countries, with £130 million going

towards United Nations agencies, £50 million to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and just £20 million for NGOs, who expressed serious concern about the paucity of support in view of the magnitude of the crisis.

<https://www.devex.com/news/uk-ngos-deeply-concerned-about-20m-for-covid-19-work-in-15-countries-97005>

Bond, the UK network for organizations working in international development has surveyed its membership to assess the landscape. 116 answered, with 53% acknowledging that they had had to cut programs and staff. 50 NGOs - a staggering 43% of respondents, reported that, all things being equal, they wouldn't survive in the next six months. Most of these NGOs are of small and medium size.

<https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2020/05/programmes-at-risk-as-more-ngos-face-closure>

“Donors’ current national priorities, volatility of guidelines or even outright lack of visibility suggest that these findings apply to the broader NGO community. The survival of small and medium NGOs appears distinctly threatened in the medium term.”

Consultation with NGOs - Trainings

OSC is surveying the humanitarian NGO landscape in terms of training and coaching needs. Focusing today on training needs, these were assessed differentiating firstly between immediate (0 – 2 months) and intermediate (2 – 6 months) needs, secondly between national and international staff. Key insights are presented below. In all cases, multiple answers were possible.

► Immediate training needs

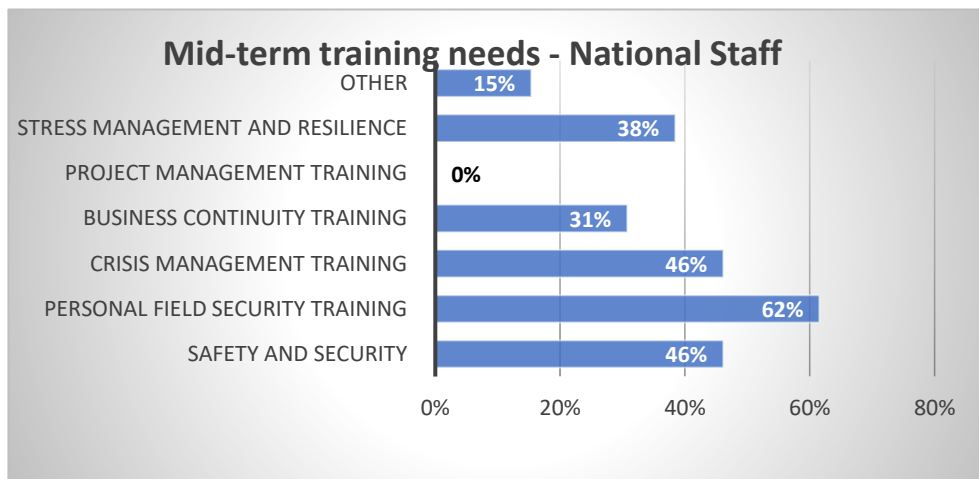
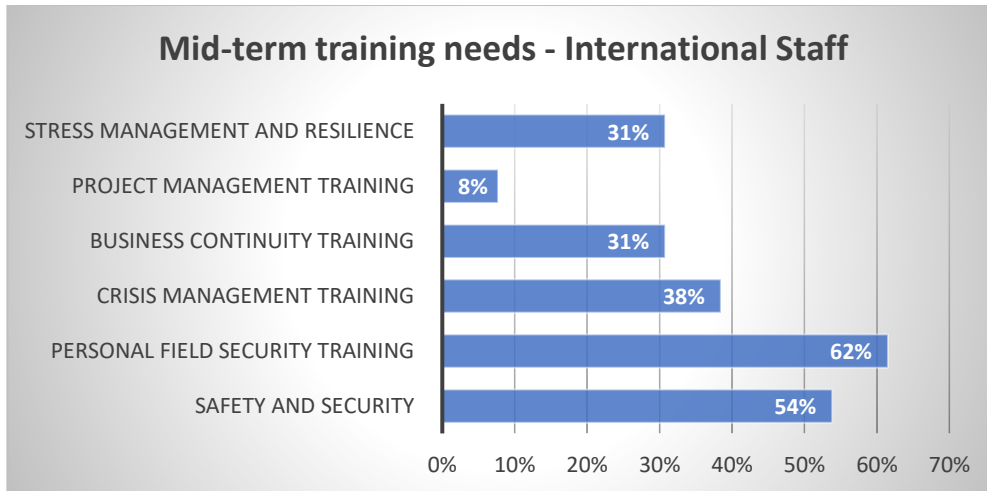


In the short-term, training needs are assessed to be substantially similar for both national and international staff, with safety and security related trainings attracting a plurality of answers. This is likely to be biased by the fact that OSC remains strongly identified as a security actor.

Differences occur for stress management with more deeming the topic relevant for international staff (38%) than for national staff (23%). Conversely, project management trainings elicit more interest for national staff (23%) than for internationals (8%). Other

answers were volunteered, but only for international staff, and these included first aid trainings.

► *Intermediate training needs*



The outlook for mid-term trainings is roughly similar, with safety and security trainings attracting a majority of responses. Surprisingly perhaps, project management trainings for national staff do not elicit interest whatsoever, suggesting that either respondents estimate that the crisis will be over by then and/or that national staff will have be fully supported in that area, possibly internally. Since interest in business continuity and crisis management trainings remains elevated – higher than for immediate trainings, it may be that organizations trust their resources to coach their field teams during “normal times” but may anticipate further volatility which would exhaust internal capacities.

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