



**HUMAN
DEVELOPMENT:
Protecting
vulnerable
populations**

Strategies for preserving gains in human development in Africa in the time of COVID

"Vaccination is the world's pathway out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, in many African countries, 9 out of 10 people are set to miss out on a vaccine next year, while rich nations have secured enough doses to vaccinate their populations three times over. We must end the unjust system of monopolies, which puts profits before lives. All pharmaceutical corporations and research institutions working on a vaccine must share the science, technological know-how, and intellectual property to maximize production and to ensure distribution based on need and free at the point of delivery. We need a People's Vaccine. Africa must not wait in line!"

Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS & Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations

Mortality in Africa due to COVID-19 is significantly lower than originally expected, although with limited testing and poor reporting systems, we will likely never know the true numbers. However, it's not yet time to celebrate: That realization must be tempered by the expectation that many more Africans will likely suffer due to the impacts that follow reductions in health and other government expenditure. As tax revenues decline on top of reductions in remittances, foreign direct investment, and possibly aid, the ability of African governments to maintain pre-COVID services will take a large hit in the short term. (For more on the drop in remittances in the time of COVID, see the viewpoint on page 17). One devastating result is that indirect mor-

tality in Africa, particularly among children below five years of age, could be double the direct mortality from COVID by 2030, given expected cutbacks to basic medical care and related interventions.⁷⁶ (For more on the reach of the COVID-19 pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa, see Figure 2.1).

In fact, within a year of Africa's first reported case in Egypt, COVID-19 has wreaked extraordinary destruction upon Africa's development prospects. The pandemic has rapidly evolved from a health crisis to an all-encompassing economic quagmire with serious international ramifications.

Our estimates⁷⁷ and that of others such as the World Bank⁷⁸ are that

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⁷⁶ Jakkie Cilliers et al., "Impact of COVID-19 in Africa: A Scenario Analysis to 2030," *Institute for Security Studies*, August 2020.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Nishant Yonzan et al., "Projecting Global Extreme Poverty Up to 2030: How Close Are We to the World Bank's 3% Goal?" *World Bank*, October 9, 2020.

Africa may lose up to a decade of developmental progress due to COVID-19, although a lot will depend on the early discovery, speedy manufacture, and efficient roll-out of vaccines as well as the subsequent rate of global economic recovery. (For more on strategies for vaccine rollout in Africa, see page 29).⁷⁹

The continent is also going to require substantial debt relief, as even ahead of the crisis a number of states were already approaching debt distress. In fact, in November 2020, Zambia became the first country to default on its loan repayments; it's possible many other countries will follow. (For more on debt relief in Africa under COVID, see page 9).

Poverty and inequality

Before the pandemic hit, the headline Sustainable Development Goal to eliminate extreme poverty by 2030 was already out of reach.⁸⁰ Now, except for Cabo Verde, no country in sub-Saharan Africa is on track to eliminate extreme poverty by 2030, though, notably, Africa's two high income countries, Seychelles and Mauritius, have already achieved this goal. (For different approaches to the SDGs under COVID-19, see the viewpoints on page 41 and 44).

Using the International Futures forecasting platform of the University of Denver, we find it is reasonable to expect around 4 percent annual average economic growth for Africa post-COVID to 2030. In this future, extreme poverty is likely to decline by only about five percentage points and, by 2030, a third of the continent's 1.7 billion peo-

ple is still likely to survive on less than \$1.90 per day. Slow growth and high inequality means that sub-Saharan Africa is only likely to achieve the elimination of extreme poverty by mid-century.

With high rates of inequality, few of the benefits of economic growth trickle down in sub-Saharan Africa,⁸¹ and, in the short term, the impact of COVID-19 will worsen the already skewed distribution of income. Furthermore, as incomes decline and government revenues shrink, it's not unreasonable to consider that the region is set to face increased turbulence and lose many of the modest gains made in combatting violent extremism and ending conflicts in the Horn, Sahel, and Central Africa, among other places—placing additional pressure on governments, peacekeepers, and mediators.

The pandemic has rapidly evolved from a health crisis to an all-encompassing economic quagmire.

The vital importance of infrastructure for education

Despite these challenges, with the right policies and implementation plans, the COVID-19 pandemic may present Africa with the opportunity to benefit from its large human capital endowment. Steady increases in Africa's working-age population, improved economic productivity, and enhanced job creation can turn the region into an economic powerhouse accompanied with improvements in quality of life more broadly.

Currently, only around 56 percent of Africa's working-age population is aged between 15 and 64—more than 10 percentage points below the average in the rest of the world (Figure 3.1). With

a smaller ratio of working-age persons to dependents, income growth in Africa is inevitably slow but will improve over time since, by mid-century, the portion of working-age Africans will be roughly similar to that in North America. If the region's leaders invest in that human capital endowment, Africa could significantly benefit from the steady increase in the portion of working-age persons to dependents.

Reaping Africa's demographic dividend presents many challenges, but perhaps most fundamental is the need for a revolution in the provision of education. Quality education—especially im-

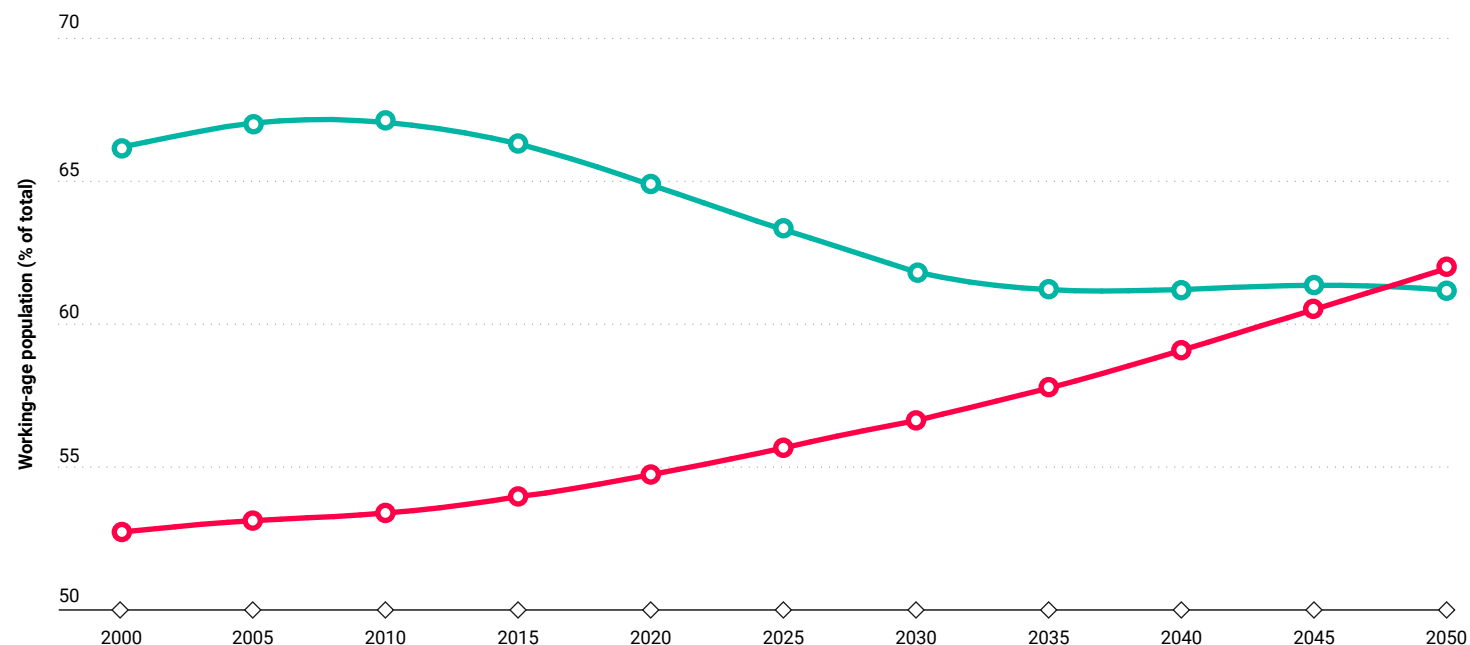
⁷⁹ See Ibid and Christoph Lakner et al., "Updated Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Global Poverty: The Effect of New Data," *World Bank*, October 7, 2020.

⁸⁰ Jakkie Cilliers, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2020).

⁸¹ North Africa, which has much lower levels of inequality, does significantly better in this respect, although it faces its own set of unique challenges.

FIGURE 3.1
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA'S WORKING-AGE POPULATION CONTINUES TO RISE RAPIDLY

Currently only around 56 percent of Africa's working-age population is aged between 15 and 64—more than 10 percentage points below the average in the rest of the world. With a smaller ratio of working-age persons to dependents, income growth in Africa is inevitably slow but will improve over time since, by mid-century, the portion of working-age Africans will be roughly similar to that in North America.



Visual Key

- Sub-Saharan Africa
- North America

Source

Authors' calculations using the International Futures forecasting platform v7.54.

provement in the knowledge and skills of Africa's rapidly growing labor force—is an absolute requirement for the continent to turn its fortunes around. The average adult African has about 6.2 years of education, some 2.5 years below the average in the rest of the world. While levels of adult education have steadily improved in Africa that gap has been constant for several decades.

Among its many challenges, COVID-19 underlines the importance for Africa of focusing on the provision of household electricity and internet access to respond to the damage caused by the pandemic. In 2020, the digital divide condemned many African children to a lost year of education as parents were unable to compensate for out-of-school children through e-learning, since most neither have electricity nor stable internet access.

Even when children can access education in sub-Saharan Africa, the quality of that education remains far behind that

in the rest of the world. Indeed, when it comes to learning outcomes, the best-performing country in the region still scores lower than the worst-performing country in Western Europe.⁸² It is, therefore, not surprising that the World Bank in 2018⁸³ warned of a "learning crisis in global education."

If the continent is to start closing the gap on key human development indicators, it must seize the opportunity offered by technology to fundamentally change the provision of basic needs like education and health care as well as key infrastructure like electricity and the provision of the internet.

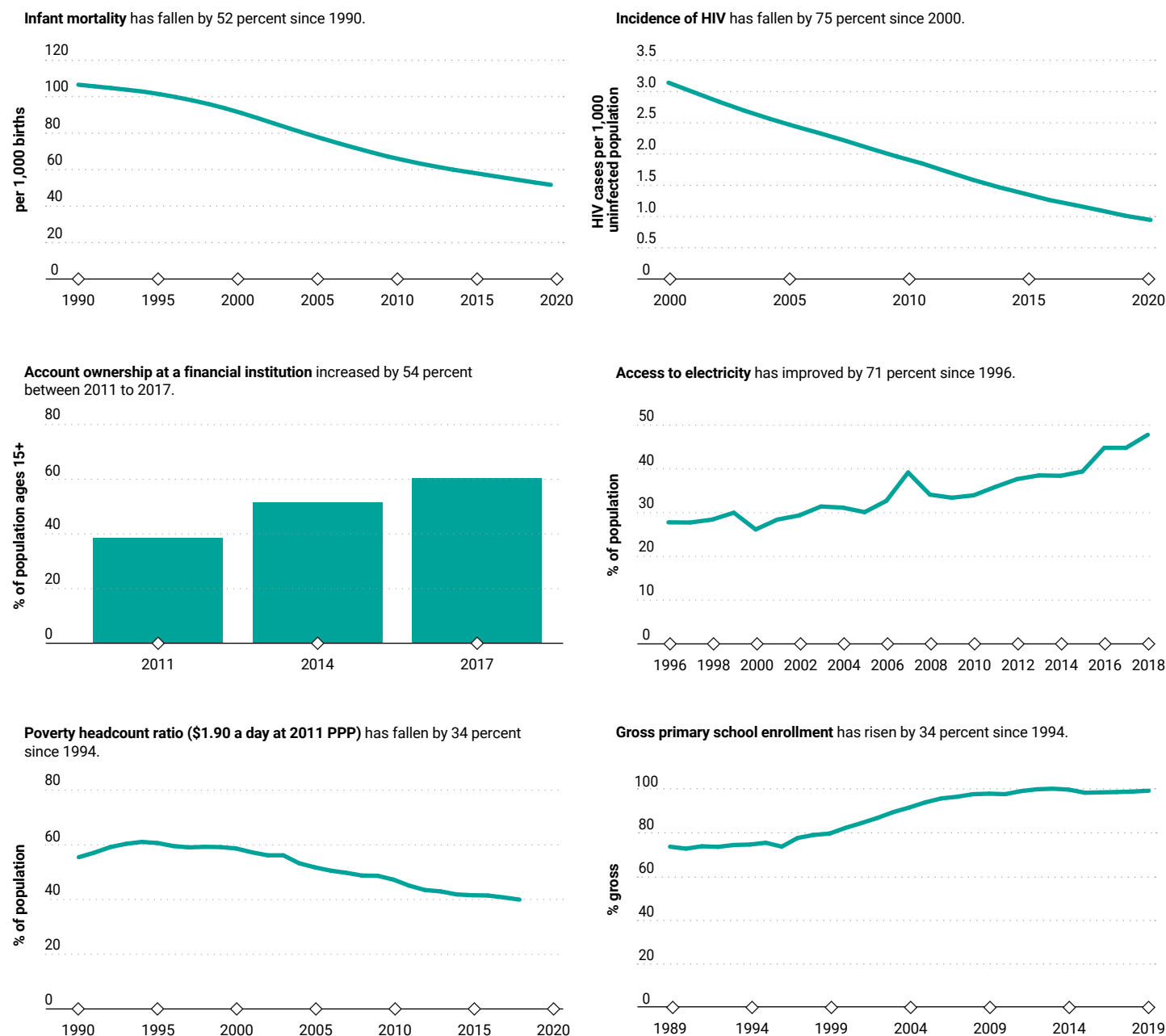
Indeed, consider that, in 2019, only about 57 percent of Africa's population had access to electricity in contrast to about 88 percent in South Asia and well over 98 percent in Latin America. New technology, particularly the potential of distributed mini- and offgrid systems using renewables, could increase electricity access, while other, novel efforts

⁸² Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, "Global Education Quality in 4 Charts," *Our World in Data*, July 27, 2018.

⁸³ World Bank, *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2018).

FIGURE 3.2 EIGHT LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many indicators around well-being had been improving substantially in sub-Saharan Africa. Infant mortality and the incidence of HIV have more than halved in the last few decades, while bank account ownership is projected to have nearly doubled in the past 10 years. The region has made significant strides in electrification, poverty, and education over the last few decades as well. While COVID-19 threatens these gains, we know better livelihoods are achievable. With the right commitment, the region can bounce back when the crisis is over.



Source

“World Development Indicators,” *World Bank Group*, accessed December 5, 2020.

such as low-earth satellites and similar initiatives could, within the foreseeable future, provide internet access across the entire continent.

The overriding lesson from COVID-19 is, therefore, to awaken African leadership to the importance of investing in

the key enablers to speed up the extent to which the continent can leapfrog. At sufficient scale, technology can have a transformative effect. Africa must leverage modern technology to improve the provision of education, health care, and general economic inclusion and productivity.

The SDGs are our compass for bolstering Africa's long-term COVID recovery

We welcomed 2020 with great expectations for Africa's promising future. Barely three months into the new decade, though, the SARS-CoV-19 virus, through devastating health impacts and resultant lockdowns, has damaged economies, destroyed jobs and livelihoods, reversed development gains, and still threatens to push up to an additional 115 million people back into extreme poverty in 2020 alone. The impacts on the world's most vulnerable people have been enormous, with twice as many people projected to be at the brink of starvation. Humanitarian needs have skyrocketed by 40 percent this year. Next year, 235 million people worldwide may need humanitarian aid and protection. Progress to improve the lives of people everywhere, through the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will be derailed.

Like any disruptive force, COVID-19 presents us with an opportunity to re-imagine a better future through our response—a fairer and more equal world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the shaky foundations on which the global and regional economy is built and exacerbated deep-seated imbalances in our economic and social structures. However, like any disruptive force, COVID-19 presents us with an opportunity to re-imagine a better future through our response—a fairer and more equal world. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is aligned with the African Union Agenda 2063, remains the best framework for doing just that.

These extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. Before the pandemic, the financing gap to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals was \$2.5 trillion per year. Now, as we set up stimulus packages, the focus must be on directing these unprecedented investments to foster inclusive and sustainable growth, meeting the needs for decent jobs, social protection floors, and connectivity for a green transition and to spur innovation—leaving no one behind.

In this way, recovering better requires drawing lessons from the current pandemic to support and bolster the SDGs. These lessons call for investing in African green transition, including smart agriculture, renewable energy, and sustainable infrastructure, to bounce back better from the current socio-economic crisis, but also to prepare for the threats posed by climate change. By connecting the almost 590 million Africans who are without electricity through renewable energy investments and by developing the infrastructure to connect people and markets, we must build a platform for a sustained green recovery that takes profit of a young, creative labor force, creates jobs

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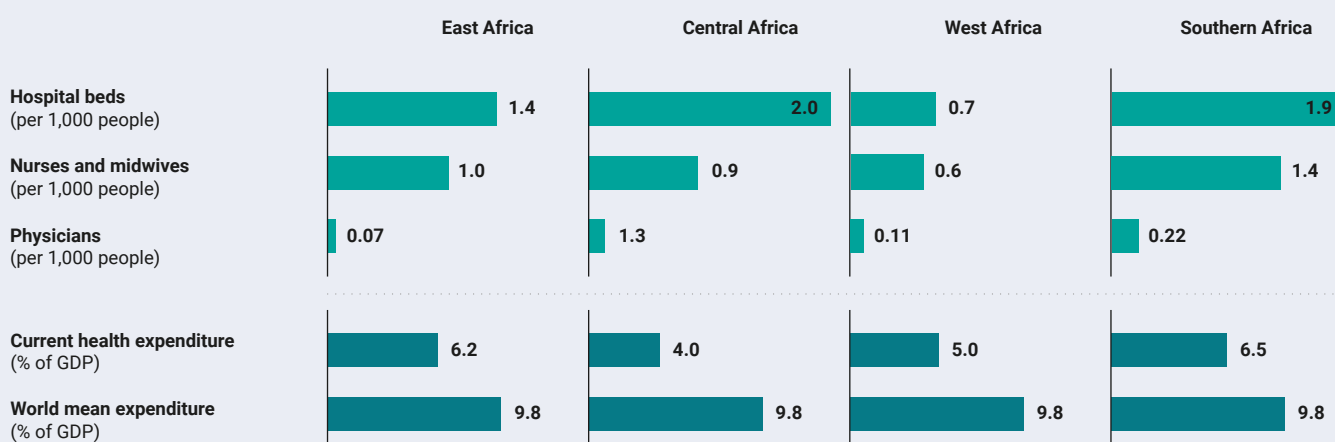
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FIGURE 3.3

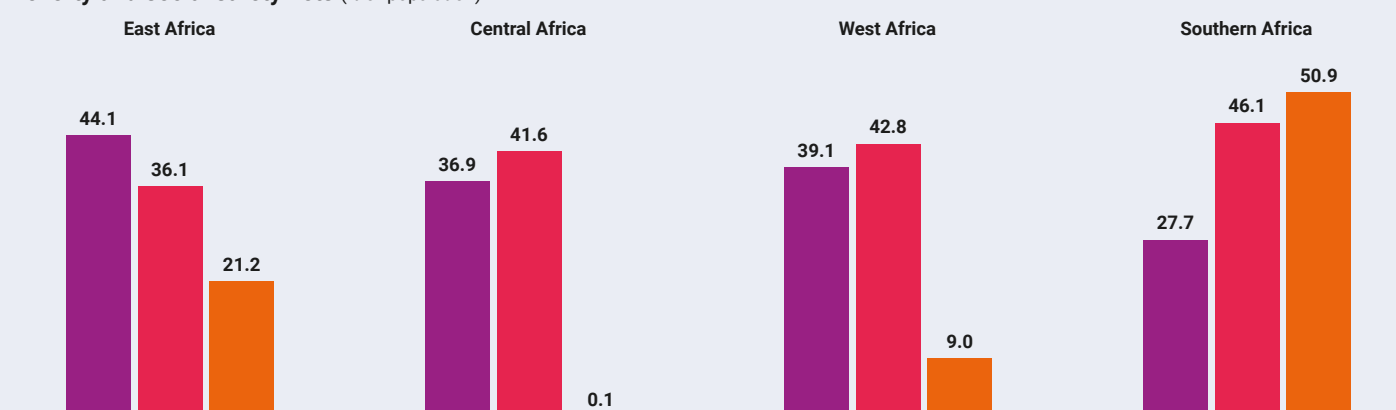
THE PANDEMIC SHAPES, AND IS SHAPED BY, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT LEVELS

Under COVID-19 and its associated economic impacts, the world has already witnessed the historic drop in the human development index. The relationship goes both ways, though: In general, countries with higher levels of human development are better equipped to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The sub-regions of sub-Saharan Africa vary in their health care infrastructure, in their liability to shocks endemic to the pandemic, and especially in the protection against poverty, where social safety net coverage in the bottom can range anywhere from 0.1 percent (Central Africa) to 50.9 percent (Southern Africa).

Health care



Poverty and social safety nets (% of population)



Visual Key

Poverty

■ Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP)

■ Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines

■ Coverage of social safety net programs in poorest quintile

Source

"World Development Indicators," World Bank Group, accessed December 5, 2020.

and entrepreneurship opportunities, expands human capital, and empowers the digital transformation of the continent.

We must keep an inclusive focus and improve access for girls to education, and youth- and women-led SMEs to markets and financing. Important steps toward this goal include providing financial and technical support to women's cooperatives and better connecting them to international markets. Moreover, urgent prerequisites to curb the pandemic and build back better include women's inclusion in decision-making, the fight against gender-based violence, the provision of skills and resources, and social protection systems that take women's needs into account. Women and girls are central to achieve each and every one of the 17 SDGs and build a prosperous, resilient future. (For more on the particular challenges facing African women and girls under COVID-19, see page 46).

We must rethink the financial architecture, with innovations under the Addis Ababa Action Agenda for Financing for Development, with a focus on ending illicit fi-

nancial flows, notably by strengthening tax administrations and enabling effective tax collection, as well as encouraging international finance to help de-risk private investments needed to accelerate progress towards the SDGs in the Decade of Action. This must be a multi-stakeholder endeavor including the private sector and philanthropic organizations alongside governments and international development partners.

We need to redress the inherent asymmetries in financial markets and ensure a level playing field for countries with good macro fundamentals, no matter the level of development. Since the crisis, only two African countries have been able to access new funds at reasonable terms. Countries with good macro fundamentals have been bypassed and have not been able to refinance their obligations, while developed countries with high debt-to-GDP ratios are able to raise funds in international markets. (For more on debt relief during this pressing time, see page 9).

We need to redress the inherent asymmetries in financial markets and ensure a level playing field for countries with good macro fundamentals, no matter the level of development.

With over \$11 trillion in assets and \$2.3 trillion annually in investments worldwide, public development banks at all levels—multilateral, regional, and national—need to be part of the solution to increase the volume and impact of investment towards recovery and achieving the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. Development banks must play a key role in de-risking investment, crowding in private finance in developing and emerging markets, turning billions into trillions needed to finance the transition to sustainable development.

Rules and institutions governing trade, finance, and technologies must enable Africa's aspirations of building a peaceful, secure, and prosperous continent.

Now, more than ever before, international cooperation can and must play a crucial role in ensuring that Africa recovers better, implementing the vision of the SDGs during this Decade of Action. Rules and institutions governing trade, finance, and technologies must enable Africa's aspirations of building a peaceful, secure, and prosperous continent. As U.N. Secretary-General Guterres often reiterates, when Africa succeeds, the world succeeds.

Africa faces a hard choice on the SDGs under COVID-19

COVID-19 has made it extremely difficult to mobilize the resources needed for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the time left to their target date of 2030. Indeed, as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) reported in July 2020, the current rate of progress on the SDGs in Africa is insufficient to meet the targets. Several other recent reports echo UNECA's view.⁸⁴

Given these difficulties and the new challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, African countries should consider reducing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the current set of 17 to a smaller much more manageable set that fully recognizes this new world, and redirect many of those efforts to fighting the crisis at hand. To be clear, African countries should not abandon the SDGs altogether. However, given the significant overlap between the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063, "The Africa We Want," I argue that efforts should be more focused on achieving Agenda 2063, which has a longer time horizon than the SDGs, which end in nine years.

Meeting the targets of the SDGs was a great challenge for African countries right from their adoption in 2015. Since March of 2020, the implementation challenge has been made even more difficult by the pandemic, given COVID-related lockdowns resulting in slowed economic growth—including an estimated 3 percent contraction of sub-Saharan Africa's economy in 2020.⁸⁵ Already, major economies such as Nigeria,⁸⁶ South Africa,⁸⁷ and Egypt⁸⁸ are either in recession or experiencing very slow growth. Continued poor export performance limits the possibilities of growth, although the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) could provide new growth impetus. Assistance promised by the G-20 and multilateral and regional financial institutions has not materialized to the extent hoped for.

Thankfully, many COVID-19 vaccines have been approved. Some have even been designed with a lower price point in mind to encourage their accessibility in the developing world. As vaccine administration has commenced in a number of countries, the world may be on the cusp of emerging from the pandemic. Africa's priority now must be to inoculate all her citizens and "build back better." Building back better demands pragmatism and realism. Realism requires a careful review of all commitments, separating "desireds" from "achievable." Pragmatism requires a rethink of the SDGs to reduce them from the current 17 goals with 169 targets to a much more achievable set.

A smaller set of achievable goals will enable policymakers in Africa and elsewhere to protect, to the greatest extent possible, the successes of the recent past in health, education, food security, and poverty. Leaders should then redirect these efforts and

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⁸⁴ See for example Philip Alston, *The Parlous State of Poverty Eradication: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights* (New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2020); United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020* (New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2020); Yongyi Min and Francesca Perucci, "Policy Brief #18: Impact of COVID-19 on SDG Progress: A Statistical Perspective," *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Policy Brief* 81 (August 2020).

⁸⁵ International Monetary Fund, *Regional Economic Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa: A Difficult Road to Recovery* (Washington, D.C.: IMF, 2020).

⁸⁶ Bamidele Samuel Adesoji, "Nigerian Economy Slips Into Recession as GDP Contracts by 3.62% in Q3 2020," *Nairametrics*, November 21, 2020.

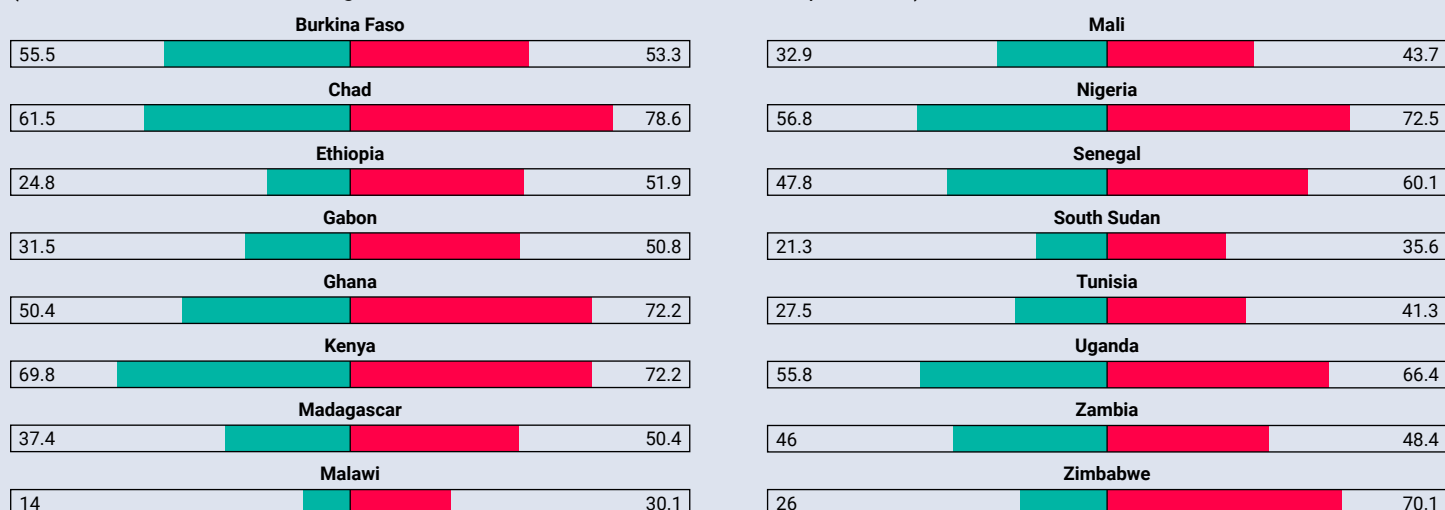
⁸⁷ Tshegofatso Mathe, "South Africa's Economy Is in a Severe Recession," *Mail & Guardian*, September 8, 2020.

⁸⁸ Noha El Tawil, "How to Perceive Global Economy in Middle of Pandemic, Recession," *Egypt Today*, October 2, 2020.

FIGURE 3.4
EDUCATION LOSSES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA SINCE THE ONSET OF THE PANDEMIC

Education losses for children in sub-Saharan African countries under COVID-19 have been huge. In the countries surveyed, less than half of the households with children who attended school before the pandemic have engaged in any educational activities in the months following school closures. Those living in rural areas have had an even harder time participating in activities: Only roughly 4 in 10 households in the countries surveyed reported participating in educational activities since schools closed in their local area.

Children engaged in any learning/education activities since school closures (select countries)
 (% of households with school-age children who attended school before the pandemic)



Visual Key

- Rural
- Urban

Source

World Bank, "COVID-19 High-Frequency Monitoring Dashboard", beta. Accessed on December 15, 2020.

consider different priorities to ensure better livelihoods in the long run to fighting the immediate crisis.

Thus, African policymakers should limit borrowing, expand fiscal space through enhanced domestic resource mobilization (including aggressive blocking of leakages), and redirect a reasonable share of available own resources to COVID-19 and managing out its economic impacts. While helpful, aid will not be enough to fill investment gaps in health, education, and poverty reduction. Fortunately, African countries have a roadmap for strengthening their health sector in the 2001 Abuja Declaration wherein they committed to allocate no less than 15 percent of their annual budget to the health sector, and progress is ongoing.

Importantly, COVID-19 revealed as never before the grave consequences of Africa's scientific and technological dependence, although the technological gap has been long-known. Building back better will require African countries to increase **domestic spending on science, technology, and innovation (STI) and aggressively expand STI partnerships.** Success in this area will place African countries in a good position to successfully confront the next pandemic.

Finally, African countries must, as a matter of urgency, develop their own pharmaceutical manufacturing sector before the next pandemic arrives. The African Union's Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa provides a good framework to achieve this goal if it can be operationalized.

Thus, while progress towards the SDGs has been laudable, African governments and their peoples might be better served with a reconsideration of the SDGs under COVID-19. Indeed, focusing on the issues noted above will continue momentum towards them in the long term, creating jobs, improving health outcomes, reducing poverty, and, ultimately, placing Africa on a footing from which it can achieve the Aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Invisible lives, missing voices: Putting women and girls at the center of post-COVID-19 recovery and reconstruction

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While COVID-19 has and continues to have devastating impacts on every sphere of life across communities around the globe, women and girls have been particularly affected. Indeed, in Africa, women and girls have largely borne the brunt of the pandemic, as the virus has exacerbated already-existing gender inequalities, laying bare serious fault lines in safety, physical and mental health, education, domestic responsibilities, and employment opportunities.⁸⁹ Though death rates from COVID-19 in Africa have been surprisingly low, the virus has massively disrupted women's lives as decades of progress towards women's rights and gender equality in Africa has begun to unravel. At the same time, African women and girls play critical roles in responding to COVID-19, including as frontline health care workers, caregivers at home and at work, and as mobilizers in their communities.⁹⁰ Given both their vulnerability and frontline roles during the pandemic, women must be at the center of the COVID-19 recovery and reconstruction.

Increased burdens due to unpaid child care and domestic work

Because of prevailing social norms, African women and girls traditionally shoulder the majority of family care responsibilities, including child care, domestic chores, and caring for the weak, the sick, and the frail in their families and society more broadly. Indeed, even before the pandemic, globally, women and girls carried out incredible burdens for their families and societies—shouldering an estimated three times more the amount of unpaid care and domestic work than men. In Kenya⁹¹ specifically, women spend an average of 11.1 hours per day on any care work compared to men's 2.9 hours.⁹² There was already a need to unburden women from unpaid domestic work by changing social and gender norms around the home care economy as well as implementing flexible working hours and better pay for women. Broader provisions of social services would lift women's care burdens and give them more time for paid jobs and leisure.⁹³

Loss of jobs and livelihoods with no social safety nets

Though job and wage losses have been widespread under COVID-related economic restrictions, women and girls remain the most vulnerable. Indeed, 92 percent of working African women are in the informal economy,⁹⁴ leaving them without job security or benefits. Under lockdown measures and without social safety nets, informal workers have had to face the tough decision whether to break the lockdown, risking both their health and legal repercussions, or go without income. But, while the COVID-19 virus

⁸⁹ Bateman, Nicole and Martha Ross. 2020. "Why has COVID-19 been especially harmful for working women?" Brookings Institution.

⁹⁰ Women Deliver. 2020. "COVID-19 and gender: What the numbers are saying."

⁹¹ Interactions. 2015. "Unpaid care work in Kenya." Accessed January 14, 2021.

⁹² Owino, Julie. 2020. "Unpaid care and domestic work is borne by women and girls in Kenya, Oxfam." *Capital Business*, February 14, 2020.

⁹³ Durant, Isabelle and Pamela Coke-Hamilton. 2020. "COVID-19 requires gender-equal responses to save economies." United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

⁹⁴ Bonnet, Florence, Joann Vanek, and Martha Chen. 2019. "Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical brief." *Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing*.

left millions of African women and children without jobs, food, and health care, the truth of the matter is that this has been a pre-existing condition long before the pandemic. Creating all-inclusive social policy and cushioning vulnerable families during and after the crisis would go a long way in protecting vulnerable women and families. At the same time, investing in women in small and large business will better secure the financial and economic health of families and economies.

Frontline workers

Over 60 percent of Africa's health care workforce and essential service providers are female, with that number reaching 91 percent in countries like Egypt.⁹⁵ Beyond risking exposure to COVID-19, death, and other illnesses, they face poor working conditions, low pay, and lack of voice as medical leadership is dominated by men. African women have been fighting the pandemic in other ways too, for example, by creating shared movements to make masks in Kenya, Ethiopia, Cameroon, and Uganda, among other countries.⁹⁶ Investing in the right health care infrastructure is critical to the well-being of frontline workers, public health, and communities.

Violence against women and girls was already an epidemic

Since the beginning of lockdowns in March of 2020, emerging and anecdotal evidence suggests that violence against women and girls in Africa has increased substantially. From spikes in rape in Nigeria and South Africa to child molestations and sex trafficking in Kenya, the pandemic has further aggravated the epidemic of gender and sexual violence.⁹⁷ Before the COVID-19 pandemic, around the world, one in three women experienced physical violence, most often by an intimate partner. Africa was no exception.

Now, the pandemic and associated lockdowns have led to financial stress and insecurity, inability to flee abuse, social isolation, crowded homes, and reduced support networks. Emerging data shows an increase in calls to domestic violence helplines⁹⁸ in many African countries⁹⁹ since the outbreak of the pandemic. In Kenya, for example, calls for help against domestic violence increased by 34 percent during the first three months of the lock down. Similar trends were reported in South Africa¹⁰⁰ and other parts of the continent.

African governments must expedite policy and non-policy actions to root out the plague of gender- and sexual-based violence. This is not a women's issue; it is a global one that demands urgent action, and men must be part of the discourse on eliminating such violence.

Governments and other stakeholders also need to rethink social and cultural practices and norms that perpetuate violence. Perhaps more important is the need to ensure that response to violence is swift and holistic as laws and policies are implemented.

Education disruptions and opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to 89 percent of the world's student population being out of school or university,¹⁰¹ inflicting most children, especially girls, with a massive learning loss. While the move to online learning has become the new normal for many children, poor educational infrastructure, especially around internet access and electricity,

⁹⁵ Chuku, Chuku, Adamon Mukasa, and Yasin Yenice. "Putting women and girls' safety first in Africa's response to COVID-19." Brookings Institution.

⁹⁶ United Nations Women. 2020. "The impact of COVID-19 on women." *United Nations*.

⁹⁷ Bhalla, Nita. 2020. "Kenya makes hospital arrests as it probes child trafficking ring." *Reuters*, November 18, 2020.

⁹⁸ Center for Primary Care. "A second, silent pandemic: sexual violence in the time of COVID-19." Harvard Medical School.

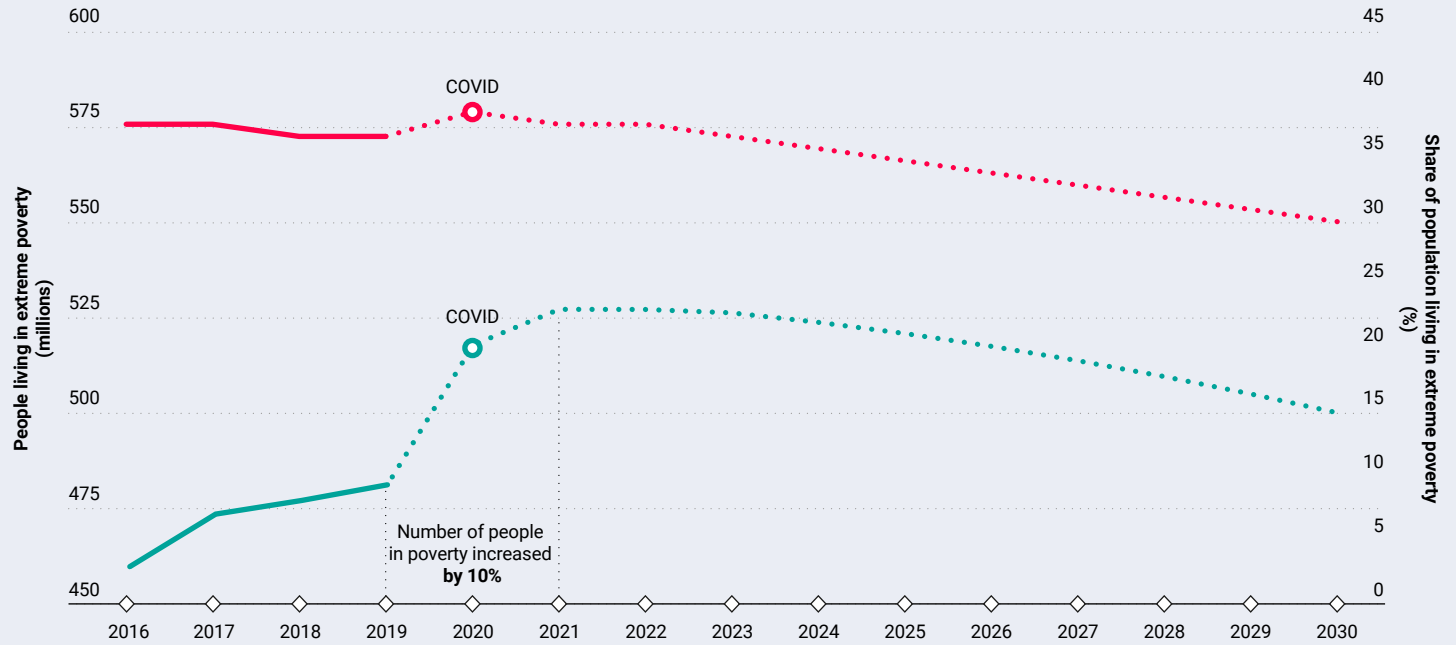
⁹⁹ Fröhlich, Silja. 2020. "Violence against women: Africa's shadow pandemic." *Deutsche Welle*, June 10, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Mahtani, Sabrina. 2020. "What must governments do to reduce gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic?" Africa Portal.

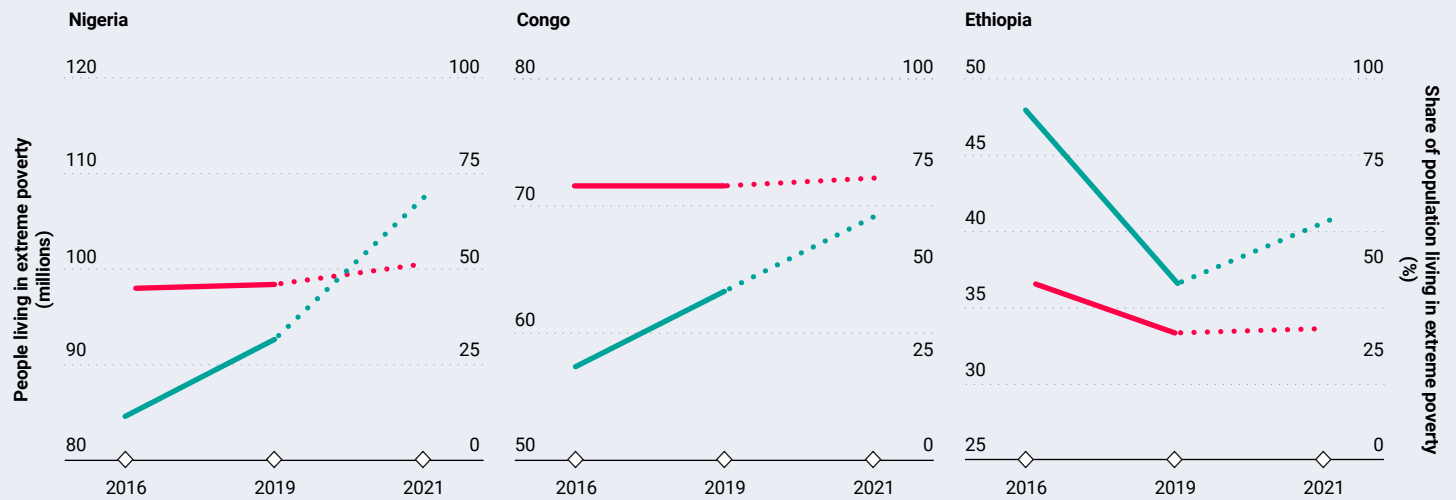
¹⁰¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2020. "Education: From disruption to recovery." United Nations. Accessed on January 15, 2020.

FIGURE 3.5 COVID-19 IMPACT ON POVERTY IN AFRICA

Successful global efforts to fight poverty have run into a wall under COVID-19. Indeed, the number of people living on \$1.90/day or less in Africa is expected to rise by nearly 10 percent—or 46 million people—from 2019 to 2021. Moreover, this figure is not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels even by 2030.



Country cases



Visual Key

- People living in extreme poverty
- Share of population living in extreme poverty

Source

World Data Lab, "World Poverty Clock". Accessed December 15, 2020.

has caused disadvantaged learners from rural, poor, and vulnerable backgrounds to lose access to all learning. Once again, though, educational inequality for girls is sadly another pre-existing condition that requires urgent attention—the pandemic has only exacerbated it. Policymakers must invest in inclusive and equitable education as well as educational infrastructure for all, but especially for vulnerable girls in rural and poor environments. Available evidence suggests that girls' education in rural areas not only empowers girls by creating opportunities for them but that it also has ripple effects on all outcomes and spheres of life.¹⁰² Loss of education, therefore, has devastating outcomes on all areas of their lives. There is also need to ensure digital equity reaches all vulnerable children, especially girls.

¹⁰² World Bank Education. 2020. "Girls' Education." World Bank Group.

Put women at the center of governance and policy

African women are largely invisible in or missing¹⁰³ from decisionmaking, policy, and governance circles. Importantly, both research and anecdotal evidence¹⁰⁴ suggest that, where women do have higher levels of leadership, governments are more likely to respond better to crises in ways that support gender equality. Promoting women's meaningful engagement in governance and leadership not only has ripple effects on all spheres of life, but also makes economic sense. Investing in women and girls creates long term social and economic benefits for all individuals, their communities and the world at large.¹⁰⁵ Available data suggests that women invest up to 90 percent of their income back into their families compared to just 30 to 40 percent by men.¹⁰⁶

Safeguard gender equality and support mental health provision

The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened to wipe away many of the gains towards gender equality made over the last two and a half decades. Thus, there is urgent need to secure and safeguard these gains not just by enacting innovative policies but also by taking steps to address the economic and social effects of COVID-19, with the twin goals of quickly recovering what was lost and rebuilding better with renewed agency for women.

Notably, another acute impact of the pandemic has been increased mental health¹⁰⁷ challenges around the world and especially for women. There is need to invest in Africa's mental health infrastructure to support women, families, and the public from adverse stress and mental health challenges that have further been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Given the myriad, complex challenges that African women face, African governments must put women at the center of the post-COVID-19 recovery and socioeconomic policies more generally.

Policy responses to COVID and for women must be holistic and all-inclusive

Given the myriad, complex challenges that African women face, African governments must put women at the center of the post-COVID-19 recovery and socioeconomic policies more generally. COVID-19 provides African policymakers, governments, and all other stakeholders with opportunities to effect systemic changes that could protect women from bearing the heaviest brunt of shocks like these in future. The COVID-19 pandemic also provides African governments opportunities to launch a broad, all-inclusive approach to policymaking and rebuild in a caring, humane and sustainable manner. After all, Africa's ability to bounce back from this pandemic could largely depend on safeguarding gender equality. If more women and girls are at the center of not just governance but also in shaping new social and economic orders, chances are that we could rebuild a more resilient, human, and ethical future for all.

¹⁰³ Harman, Sophie. 2016. "Ebola, gender and conspicuously invisible women in global health governance." *Third World Quarterly*, 37 (3): 524-541.

¹⁰⁴ Rios-Kohn, Rebeca. 2013. "Gender equality and women's empowerment." *Millennium Achievement Goals Fund*

¹⁰⁵ UN Women. 2020. "Facts and figures: Economic empowerment."

¹⁰⁶ Leticia, Pfeffer. 2014. "10 reasons why investing in women and girls is so important." *Global Citizen*, July 9, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Semo, Bazghina-werq and Souci Mogga Frissa. 2020. "The mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications for Sub-Saharan Africa." *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 13: 713-720.

The future of data: Unmasking community-level differences to better address food insecurity

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the challenge created by high-level, aggregated data when addressing chronic food security and other lasting challenges affecting Africa—namely the masking of community-level differences, which inhibits the effective distribution of resources in the region. Technological advancements now bring clarity to these gaps, equipping today's generation of committed policymakers to tackle complex problems, especially those around food security. Until now, the best available data has been sparse, dated, and aggregated. Fortunately, data scientists have developed new machine learning (ML) models that can now produce reliable, local data for areas where data has been historically difficult or impossible to access.

This approach allows policymakers the opportunity to develop data-driven strategies that improve food security down to the neighborhood level. Within a continent of astounding diversity, this swift and localized understanding will be essential in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic's (and any future) threat to food security and providing stable access to food in its aftermath.

Swift and localized understanding will be essential in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic's (and any future) threat to food security.

Already, we have witnessed the power of ML-produced data when helping to combat the health emergency of COVID-19. For example, at the onset, Fraym delivered hyper-local geospatial data to responders across the continent to help identify and understand community-level risks. In fact, geospatial data on sanitation, livelihoods, and behaviors were some of the first inputs guiding the National Action Plan in Kenya. Communications access data helped Zambian public health policymakers identify, quantify, and locate populations that internet- or phone-based data collection methods may have missed. ML-produced data enabled fast and targeted responses like these and countless others during the rapidly unfolding health crisis.

Ben Leo

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Co-Founder, Fraym

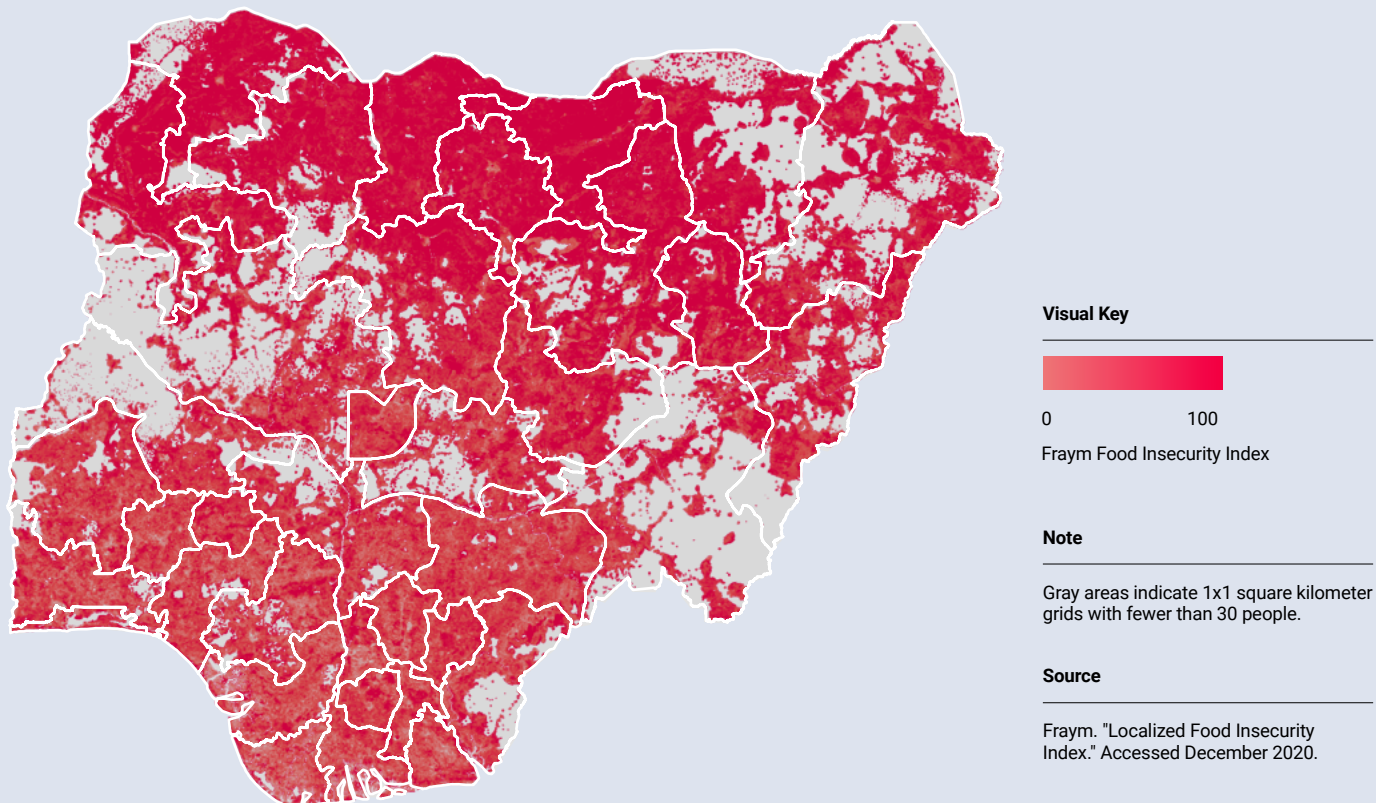
[@Leo_Benjamin](#)

Similar technologies and data will transform policymakers' understanding of multi-dimensional, local challenges to food insecurity, especially as the pandemic's impact unfolds. In radically improving our understanding of communities that previously have remained one-dimensional or invisible in traditional data repositories, ML gives policymakers a new toolkit for allocating resources with the greatest impact and efficiency. Fraym has already begun to investigate more complex ap-

FIGURE 3.6

LEVELS OF FOOD SECURITY VARY WIDELY IN NIGERIA

The darker regions in the northern part of the country in the figure highlight higher levels of food insecurity, including undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting, and child mortality. By visualizing such data at the community level, policymakers can make better informed choices when it comes to human development needs.



plications of this data, including adapting the International Food Policy Research Institute's Hunger Index to rapidly quantify square-kilometer vulnerability to food insecurity (Figure 3.6). Similar creative approaches that maximize newly available tools can ensure that policymakers, health workers, and others tackling food insecurity among Africa's most vulnerable communities can act upon granular insights that help them reach individuals faster, more efficiently, and more effectively. Even amid a pandemic, food security in Africa is not just aspirational, but achievable with the right tools supporting committed, data-driven decisionmakers.

Even amid a pandemic, food security in Africa is not just aspirational, but achievable with the right tools supporting committed, data-driven decisionmakers.