

WHITE PAPER

COVID-19 & Other Epidemics
Short- & Medium Term Response

2 April 2020

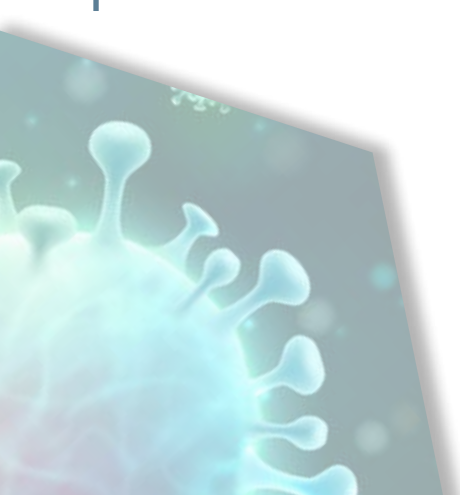


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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, and its global impact is profound. As confirmed¹ cases rapidly increase around the world, evidence so far shows that COVID-19 is a threat to many lives. World-wide, economic activities have been disrupted, health systems are overwhelmed, the value of assets is depleted, and lasting geopolitical changes have been triggered. To date, confirmed cases from 203 countries are at 936 865. Of the total cases, 47 264 deaths and 194 658 recovered have been reported². In Africa, 6 383 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed from 48 countries. There are 197 confirmed deaths and 408 recovered³. The total number of cases in Africa is relatively lower compared to Asia, Europe and the Americas.

Whilst health aspects are paramount and urgent, there is recognition of the social and economic havoc that COVID-19 is already causing globally. There are a lot of “known unknowns” concerning the spread of COVID-19 in Africa. The disease itself and the measures taken by many countries to slow-down the spread of COVID-19 are drastically impacting social and economic activities. Once an economy is shutdown (or locked-down), it is extremely difficult for the economy to recover to the level it had attained prior to the lockdown. Livelihoods at individual, household, community and business (formal and informal) levels are being disrupted daily. In Africa, the adverse impact on performance of micro, small, medium and even large businesses and social dynamics in different communities⁴ is unimaginable. The consequences range from reduced operational capacity to loss of contract work, drop in demand and suppressed markets. Ultimately, the chain of events leads to inevitable loss of jobs and income. The way Governments operate is not spared, given the weak digital connectedness.

Around the world, desperate and disparate efforts are being implemented to contain this disruptive pandemic. The restrictive measures such as national lockdowns are “double-edged”: The acute pullback in economic (and social⁵) activity, necessary to protect public health, is

simultaneously jeopardizing the economic well-being of citizens and institutions⁶. Governments have a short window to mount public health responses that can stem COVID-19 spread. The same Governments must also put in place social and economic responses to cushion people from disruptions caused by this pandemic. Lockdowns are badly hurting the informal and small business sectors which are a major source of livelihoods for a significant part of the African population. Therefore, appropriate initiatives have to be implemented to address the current realities faced by African countries.

In Africa, at the continental level, the African Union Commission through its Center for Disease Control developed a continent-wide strategy with two overarching goals of (i) Preventing severe illness and death from COVID-19 infection in Member States, and (ii) Minimizing social disruption and economic consequences of COVID-19 outbreaks. Such actions envisage that the Africa CDC (i) coordinates the efforts of Member States, African Union agencies, World Health Organization, and other partners to ensure synergy and minimize duplication; (ii) promote evidence-based public health practice for surveillance, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and control of COVID-19.

Also, at the continental level, the AU has acted swiftly to establish a Coronavirus fund with commitments already totaling USD20 million. At the national level, most African countries have implemented lockdowns, testing (of suspected cases) and contact tracing. The downside of lockdowns, if they are prolonged⁷, is their negative impact on social and economic activities. In poor and populous communities, prolonged lockdowns are a ready trigger for social unrest. Therefore, AUDA-NEPAD short-term response and support to Member States is situated in the context of slowing down the pandemic, knowing more about how COVID-19 is spreading and lessening the socio-economic impact. The lower numbers of confirmed cases in Africa are more than worrying because they do not help us to understand the scale of the COVID-19 outbreak (i.e., actual total number of COVID-19 cases). Except

for South Africa, the rate of change of the confirmed cases is also lower: Are we doing enough tests to get the overall picture? What of if the pandemic takes a turn for the worst on the continent during the impending winter season? China and to a lesser extent South Korea introduced aggressive lockdowns to manage the outbreaks and ramped up testing in addition to response capabilities⁸. Is Africa sitting on huge numbers of “undocumented cases of COVID-19”? Could these numbers be among Africa’s largely rural population or hard-to-reach communities (e.g. informal settlements)? How can Africa deal with this dire “known unknowns” situation?

The Different Phases of COVID-19 Transmissions

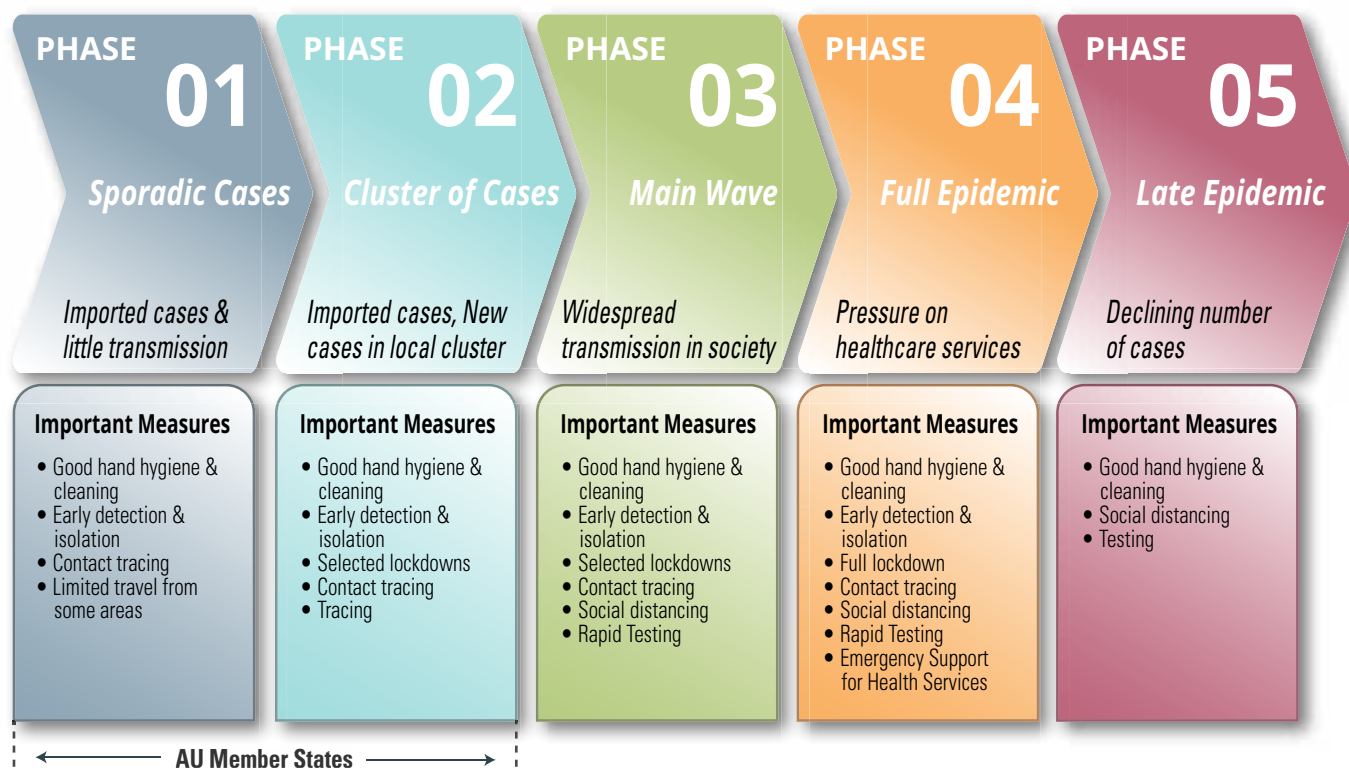


Figure 1: The Different Phases of COVID-19 Transmission

Africa has a window of opportunity (see Figure 1) to learn (quickly!) from the patterns, trends and experiences of high-risk countries that designed and implemented responses to slow down the spread of the pandemic and protect populations from the socio-economic adverse impact. Africa also has the different lessons to learn from; to design medium- to long-term regional programmes to strengthen our health systems and shield vulnerable populations from socio-economic impacts of the current as well as future pandemics. For AUDA-NEPAD, the immediate response is to support Member States to intensify and accelerate their (1) Mitigation (intended to slow down but not necessarily stop the spread of the epidemic in order to manage the peak healthcare demand and protect the most vulnerable groups), (2) Suppression (aimed at reversing the epidemic growth by reducing the number of cases to low levels using mainly clinical interventions) measures. As the pandemic continues to adversely impact on most socio-economic activities in African countries, the most optimistic (yet most unlikely) scenario expects the GDP growth of Africa to drop from 3.9% to 0.4% in 2020¹⁰. Given this likelihood, AUDA-NEPAD medium- to long-term responses are situated in five key priorities that are aimed at strengthening (1) Health Systems, (2) Food Systems (3) Skills Development and Employment, (4) Education and (5) National Planning and Data Systems. Therefore, the appropriate actions to take should be prioritized and resources mobilized to cover the full scope of work. AUDA-NEPAD will deliver in those critical areas leveraging the support of its technical networks and its south-south and triangular cooperation.

AUDA-NEPAD RESPONSE AREAS

Health Systems

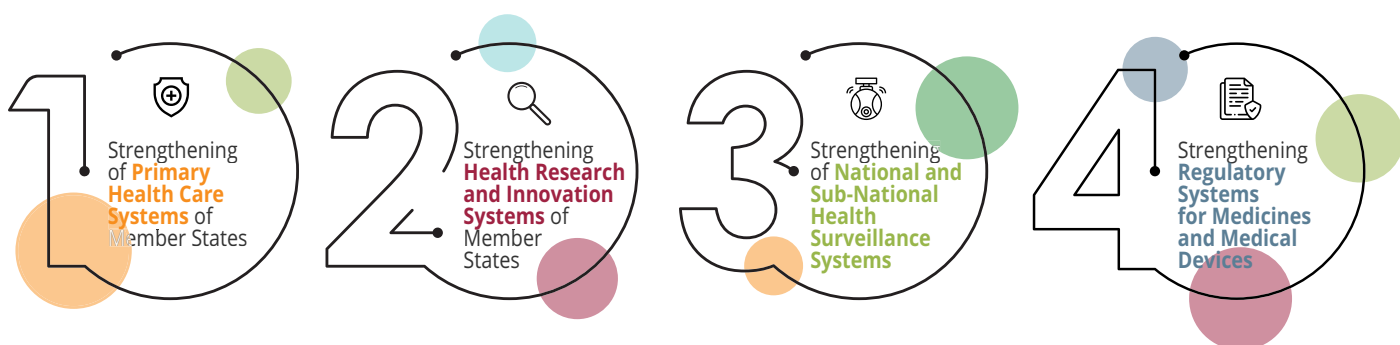
Africa's economic development is closely interrelated with the health status of its population. With the overall health systems in Africa already overstretched by the high prevalence of endemic diseases (HIV-AIDS, TB, Malaria, etc.), Member States should focus on containment and aggressive preventive measures. The main goal of this response area is for AUDA-NEPAD to support Member States in accelerating containment measures against COVID-19. The intervention areas and activities are:



BOX 1 Strengthening COVID-19 Containment Measures in Africa

1. Activation of a critical number of community health and social workers or volunteers to work on accurate messaging and sharing information with Most-at-Risk Populations. These health workers are trusted and known members of the targeted communities. Many of the communities in Africa are large and densely populated making "social distancing" difficult. Community health and social workers have tacit knowledge and relationships which can be used to manage COVID-19 during lockdowns;
2. Use existing cholera mapping (as guides to identify areas prone to disease outbreaks) and prevention systems to support the implementation of frequent sanitization practices;
3. Support widespread testing of people for COVID-19 using feedback from community health and social workers in (1) and any other leads. Conduct tests using national laboratories, personnel, equipment and as much as possible include diagnostic kits produced locally alongside kits produced elsewhere (Europe, USA, Asia, etc.). Identify laboratories (P3 Safety level or otherwise) on the continent that have real-time PCR skills and thermocyclers to ramp-up testing.
4. Support the local production of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for healthcare providers and symptomatic patients such as masks, gowns, aprons and overalls.
5. Invest in mobilizing epidemiologists for mapping COVID-19 spread. This is a critical pre-emptive to understand potential sources of infection and exponential growth of numbers of cases in different countries.

There are variant dimensions¹¹ of strengthening national and regional health systems, however for medium- to long-term AUDA-NEPAD will focus on the following:



Food Systems

In the past decades, African Governments and institutions have focused on two main challenges characterizing our food systems namely (i) inadequate emergency response mechanisms supported by effective early warning systems; (ii) unknown food flows manifested as inadequate supply of affordable food and poor access to this food. COVID-19 shutdowns have disrupted the food systems and exacerbated the situation of resource-poor households and communities. The need for food by vulnerable households in both rural and urban Africa, during the shutdowns, must be addressed. Therefore, the response by AUDA-NEPAD should be implemented in phases. At the policy level, food and nutrition should be treated as security issues. The reforms of the continent’s food systems should emphasize the importance of value-chains, health and wellbeing of consumers, reducing food waste and promoting a culture of sustainable use of food.

As part of COVID-19 response, AUDA-NEPAD should put in place mechanisms to:



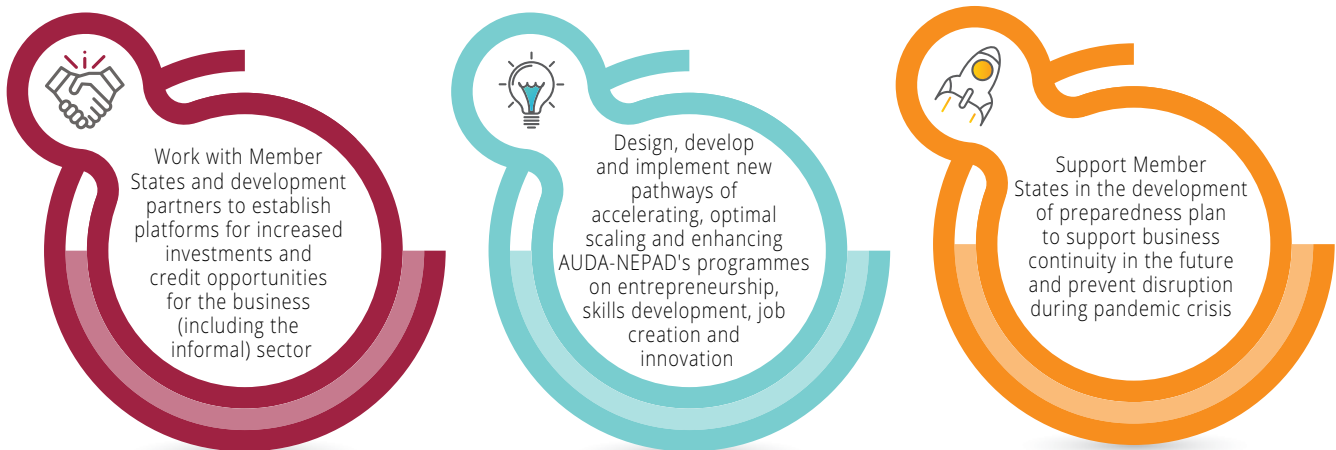
The quick take-off of such actions is premised on the lessons learnt and social capital created over the years that AUDA-NEPAD has been implementing CAADP. The short-term interventions by AUDA-NEPAD will focus on:



Skills Development and Employment

Pandemics and natural disasters adversely affect businesses and the economy as a whole. In Africa, the economic impact is more severe given that the informal sector is estimated to make up 55% of the economy of sub-Saharan Africa. This means that measures such as lockdowns and social distancing will lead to loss of income and jobs in the informal sector. The informal sector depends on daily business transactions and sales for their income and livelihoods. As such governments should provide policy responses to buffer their economies and protect businesses (both formal and informal) from the effects of COVID-19 and other pandemics. Only few African governments (e.g., South Africa), have announced concrete measures intended to provide economic relief packages to business enterprises to cushion them against the adverse effects of COVID-19.

However, there are still no clear concrete measures for vulnerable groups such as the informal sector. This is an opportune time for national governments to reflect on prioritizing entrepreneurs and innovators. There is need for increased investments in skills for retooling the youth. Africa's youth has an average median age of 20 making the need to create opportunities urgent. The youth needs to be supported to refine, improve and adapt their skills for securing critical jobs or business opportunities in all subsectors of different African economies. AUDA-NEPAD has comprehensive programmes on entrepreneurship, skills development, job creation and innovation. The goal of this intervention is to scale, replicate and accelerate priority programmes on entrepreneurship, skills development, job creation and innovation. AUDA-NEPAD will support Member States in the following areas:



Education

Pandemic and natural disasters affect education systems worldwide resulting in closures of schools, colleges and universities. While these closures seem to present a logical solution to enforcing social distancing within communities, prolonged closures tend to have disproportionate adverse effects on the most vulnerable students, teachers and families. The current school closures in most AU Member States have shed insights into the social and economic issues such as digital learning, student debt settlements, food insecurity, homelessness and access to childcare support. In Africa during

national lockdowns, students in rural areas do not have the same learning opportunities as their compatriots who live in urban areas and have access to internet facilities. In areas where school feeding programmes are active, closure of schools also means inadequate food for resource-poor households. Therefore, AUDA-NEPAD wants to implement an intervention to provide technical support to Member States to mitigate the social and economic adverse effects of school closures during COVID-19 pandemics and other unforeseen future crises such as natural disasters. Member States may also need to enhance the delivery of civic education to create awareness

about the pandemics, epidemics and other infectious diseases. Specifically, AUDA-NEPAD will provide support to Member States in the following areas:

01 Assisting Member States to enhance and strengthen their Educational System Preparedness Protocols and Frameworks for Pandemics and Natural Disasters

02 Work with Member States and partners in the provision of virtual learning tools and platforms for vulnerable communities

03 Provide physical infrastructure (electricity, internet etc.) support for vulnerable communities to access and utilize offline and online learning and virtual learning platforms

National Planning and Data Systems

Building on more than a decade of experience, AUDA-NEPAD has been supporting countries and RECs to strengthen their planning processes, improve coordination to align national/regional strategic priorities to AU-Continental framework. These processes are undermined by disruptive events such like the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, some of these processes are not evidence based and hence they impact negatively on the policy decisions and its outcomes. Therefore, policymakers, planners and managers need high quality data to derive actionable insights for improving the performance of all economic sectors. However, in most Africa economies, there are still some challenges and gaps with regards to integrated data-driven knowledge generation, and use of the knowledge in planning, designing and implementation of interventions. In times of pandemics and disasters, these gaps exacerbate the challenge of tracking the scale (and rate) of epidemics and disasters. Effective tracking requires coordinated and integrated good quality data sources

that can be used as inputs to the planning system. These may entail integrating regular national statistical data sources such as population censuses, civil registration systems, household surveys data with sector specific sources such as health and medical data systems, commerce and trade data sources etc. The overall goal of this response area is to use of innovation data and evidence for planning developmental programmes and to mitigate future unforeseen crises such as epidemics and natural disasters. Specifically, AUDA-NEPAD will support Member States in the following:

Strengthening National and Sub-National Data Systems and Infrastructure



Improving evidence-based decision making and policy response processes at national and regional institutions



Use data and insights to promote citizen engagement



Building partnerships with national and regional institutions such National Statistics Offices (NSOs) to strengthen trans-national data governance systems and frameworks for regional integration programmes on infrastructure, trade etc



Strengthening South/South and intra-Africa cooperation to promote learning, capacity building and resource optimization

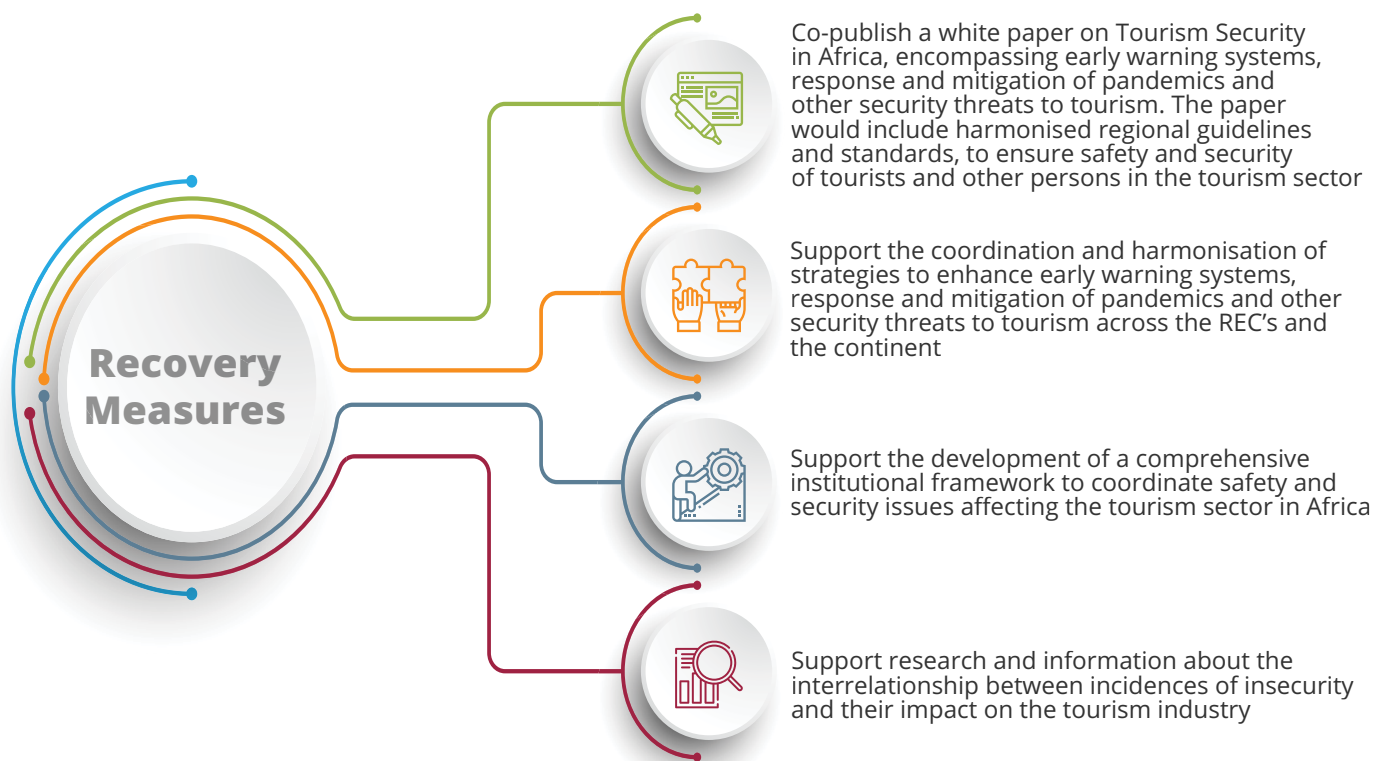


Sustainable Tourism

Tourism is the backbone of economies around the world. It brings in essential currency and inward investment, creates jobs and stimulates every sector. In Africa, tourism contributes about 10 Million direct jobs and 7% of the continent's Gross Domestic Product. The coronavirus pandemic means the world is facing a threat on multiple fronts not seen in peacetime. The impact of the pandemic on already slowing economies has made tourism particularly vulnerable, becoming the hardest hit sector so far. With 80% of the sector made up of small and medium-sized enterprises, millions of livelihoods in the world are left vulnerable. The sector is in a fight for survival.

However, it is proven that tourism is uniquely placed to lead future recovery. The sector will provide the jobs that people need to bounce back and will drive economic growth that will help whole African countries to recover. Due to its cross-cutting economic nature and deep social footprint, tourism is uniquely positioned to help societies and communities return to growth and stability. Return to growth and economic stability depends on adequate political support and recognition, such as (a) financial and political support for recovery measures targeting the tourism sector in the most affected countries (b) recovery measures and incentives to be planned and implemented in coordination with international development and donor organizations; and (c) tourism support to be included in the wider recovery plans and actions of the African economies.

Therefore, the AUDA-NEPAD would create the first reference system synthesizing good practices and responses, to offer the AU member states the tools to respond to the pandemic, as well as anticipate future risks and threats to the tourism sector. To support the wider recovery plans and actions, the AUDA-NEPAD will work with partners, to provide guidance and support for recovery measures of its member states as follows:

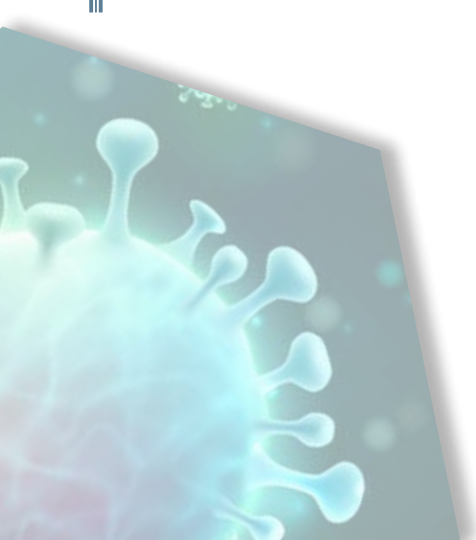
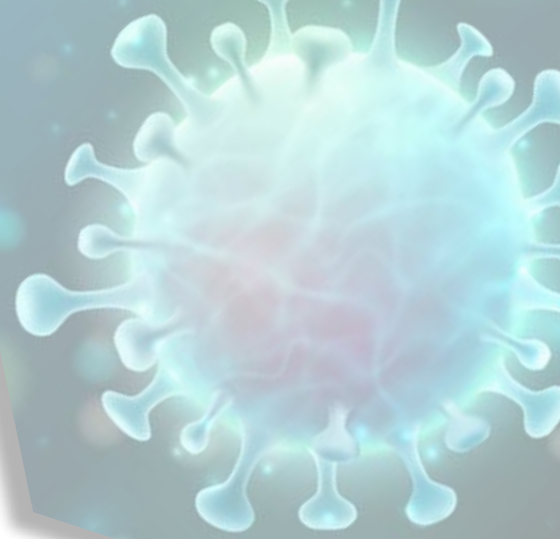


Endnotes

- 1 The total number of people infected with COVID-19 is not known. A confirmed case “a person with laboratory confirmation of COVID-19 infection” according to the World Health Organization
- 2 COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic (www.worldometers.info). Last accessed April 1st 2020
- 3 Johns Hopkins University & Medicine. Accessed www.coronavirus.jhu.edu, April 1 2020
- 4 Diana Mitlin, (27 March). Dealing with COVID-19 in the towns and cities of the global South. <https://www.iied.org/dealing-covid-19-towns-cities.../>.
- 5 Our own emphasis
- 6 Kevin Sneader and Shubham Singhal (March 2020). Beyond coronavirus: The path to the next normal. McKinsey & Company
- 7 A day or anytime longer is enough to cause enormous socio-economic problems such as loss of income, loss of jobs, closure of businesses (particularly MSMEs), drop in productivity and many more.
- 8 McKinsey & Company (Updated March 25, 2020). COVID-19: Briefing materials-Global health and crisis response
- 9 Ruiyun Li, et al., (16 March 2020). Substantial undocumented infection facilitates the rapid dissemination of novel coronavirus (SARS-Cov2). *Science* 10.1126/science.abb3221.
- 10 Katrik Jayaram, et al., (April 2020). Tackling COVID-19 in Africa: An unfolding health and economic crisis that demands bold action
- 11 GHS INDEX (October 2019). Global Health Security Index-Building Collective Action and Accountability. www.ghsindex.org



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