

COVID-19

PERSPECTIVES ACROSS AFRICA

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Chapter Two

Rendering Africa more resilient, sustainable, and better prepared for COVID-analogous pandemics: Proposals from across seven African countries

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Abstract - This chapter details a number of proposals for rendering African countries more resilient, sustainable and better prepared for COVID-19 and similar future pandemics. The proposals were solicited from a group of participants from various countries in Africa, who previously (2016) participated in week-long face-to-face dialogues as part of a project entitled “Re-inventing democracy in the digital age” funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund and organized by the Futures Worlds

Center. Many of the youth pioneers (aged 18-30) who participated in the 2016 sessions subsequently continued to liaise with one another via various virtual forums. In August 2021, spearheaded by the Future Worlds Center, we decided to set a “triggering question” for these participants to reflect upon and engage around with each other, with the aim of writing a chapter on responses to COVID-type pandemics, to share with audiences. The triggering question to kindle Ideas/proposals was: “What actions/reforms/policies should our country take in order to become more resilient, sustainable and better prepared for future crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic?” Volunteer participants were invited to share their Ideas regarding practical and forward-looking (visionary) responses to this question. They were invited in the first instance to share Ideas on a virtual platform called IdeaPrism in preparation for a video conference using Zoom in which clarifications of the Ideas were solicited from the Idea-originators, by others asking questions. The clarification questions were mainly around actual or potential ways of actioning the Ideas within and across countries. This resulted in a rich array of concrete proposals, which we detail in the chapter, along with an overarching synthesis.

Key words: Preparedness for crises; dealing with pandemics; actionable and forward-looking idea-creation; dialogue to deepen understandings of ideas; bottom-up participation in democracy.

Abbreviations

FWC:	Future Worlds Center
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
IT:	Information Technology
KEMSA:	Kenya Medical Supplies Agency
MAYO:	Marvel Acts Youth Organization
NTV:	(Kenya) National Television
SDD:	Structured Democratic Dialogue
TQ:	Triggering Question
UNDEF:	United Nations Democracy Fund

1. Introduction

The writing of this chapter is part of a larger project called “Re-inventing democracy in the digital age”. This project was funded (2016-2017) by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) on the basis of a proposal for funding put forward by the founding CEO of the Future Worlds Center (FWC) – Yiannis Laouris. Participants from five geographical regions – with Africa being one such region – engaged with each other (in separate groupings) to deliberate face-to-face for a week upon options for re-inventing democracy in the digital age. From Africa 16 participants were involved. A pictorial description of the methodology utilized in the project – called Structured Democratic Dialogic (SDD)¹ is offered in Laouris *et al.*, (2017: 14).

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□ The methodology was registered as a collective service mark by the Institute for 21st Century Agoras under the name Dialogic Design Science in 2002.

Briefly put, typical SDD processes are always structured around a set of Triggering Questions (TQs), one of which triggers discussion around identifying and prioritizing challenges being faced (as seen and discussed by the participants) and another which triggers discussion around identifying the most influential Ideas on the level of action which would constitute effective intervention towards a (more) collective wellbeing/quality of life. In response to each TQ, participants submit Ideas, which are clarified by the originators of the Ideas, also in response to clarification questions asked by other participants. The participants then move towards developing a shared language to communicate Ideas and their meaning. Thereafter, mapping processes ensue, which maps their collective agreements regarding the Influence of Ideas on other Ideas (aided by a software tool called the Cogniscope).² The TQs as formulated for the 2016 re-invent democracy dialogues, were intended to trigger participants' deliberations around the roots of shortcomings of current systems of governance, and final mapping of what was (collectively) deliberated to be the most influential action options that could best serve as points of intervention for the re-invention of democracy in the digital age.

SDD processes are based on inviting a wide range of concerned stakeholders to the discussion. In the case of deliberating about our future, the youth are of course prime contenders for participation. Hence the re-invent democracy project focused on “youth” as participants (18-30 years of age). The youth who became core participants in the project were chosen on the basis of a number of criteria that the FWC team applied in assessing the applications submitted, following the project being advertised in various forums (using global alliances of the FWC and various social media). For example, years of relevant experience and prior relevant activities became criteria of selection. Youth were also selected on the basis of their being potentially influential as young leaders, and as belonging to associations with wide networks. The commitment to the project (as sensed by the FWC team by perusing the applications with the attendant videos) was taken into account. Their country of origin was also considered, so that participants from a range of countries in the region could contribute to the discussions. The FWC team also ensured a balanced gender distribution of participants. In the African cohort, countries that were represented were: Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe (with 16 core participants). The week-long dialogues were held in Kenya (9-13 May 2016) at the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development.³

In the arrangements towards writing of this chapter, with specific reference to rendering Africa more resilient, sustainable and better prepared for COVID-analogous pandemics, participants from the

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□ The Cogniscope software facilitates the gradual development of an influence map (or influence tree), based on people's collective deliberations around pair-wise comparisons between ideas. The Cogniscope implements the Interpretive Structural Modeling algorithm, initially developed by Warfield (1973; 1994) and adapted by Christakis (Christakis and Dye, 2007) and further optimized by the first author of this article (ISM Parallel, 2015), to reduce the number of pairs of ideas that the participants should consider for an influence relation.

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□ The report on the results developed by the African cohort can be found at: http://reinventdemocracy.info/w/images/8/84/RD_AFRICA_Initiative_Report_2018HIGHRES.pdf.

original African cohort were invited to participate in a two-hour virtual symposium to be followed by working together virtually on this chapter. 12 participants expressed interest. In arranging (via doodle) a time and date suitable to the majority, 6 were able to attend the symposium (held on 24 August 2021), and another posted 3 Ideas on IdeaPrism for the group to see. Participants from the following countries participated: Cameroon (additionally sharing from experience in Madagascar), Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe.⁴ It should be emphasized that in this symposium (2021), we did not implement a full SDD process as described in the literature (e.g., Christakis and Bausch, 2006; Cisneros and Hisijara, 2013; Jones, 2008; Kakoulaki and Christakis, 2020; Laouris, 2012; Laouris *et al.*, 2009ab, 2018; Flanagan, 2021). Instead, we took as basis the collaborative thinking and collective intelligence that had been developed in the 2016 interactions of the African cohort, and we asked these SDD-experienced participants in a less structured narrative style to now consider a TQ specifically relevant to addressing crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The TQ was: *“What actions/reforms/policies should our country take in order to become more resilient, sustainable and better prepared for future crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic?”* The intention was to generate meaningful dialogue towards designing a feasible as well as imagination-imbued future. This can be likened to what has sometimes been called an asset-based approach (Kretzmann *et al.*, 2005; Mathie and Cunningham, 2008; Syarifuddin and Nildawati, 2017; Woldegies, 2014). As Syarifuddin and Nildawati (2017: 3365) put it, the aim is to “identify strengths in the community through Focus Group Discussion and Appreciative Interviewing”, with the intention to “map assets in the community”. As Chilisa (2012: 174) likewise expresses, the research processes (with all the participants being co-researchers) must be designed to avoid debilitating accounts of people and communities, as this is counterproductive to people’s collective participation in forwarding the future of which we all are part. Hence the dialogical processes have to be designed to encourage “asset-based” thinking and discussion around options for strengthening of such assets. The discussion which is the subject of this chapter was arranged accordingly.

One of the premises underlying SDD processes is that democracy as practiced within any SDD encounter or part thereof, as well as in the wider society, is clearly not merely a matter of aggregating (or adding up through voting) the initial ideas that people might put forward as “preferences”. Democracy as understood by proponents of SDD implies people together seeking convergence towards solutions that are likely to contribute to increased collective wellbeing (quality of life) overall. In the African context this is consistent with Adyanga’s point that in pre-colonial Africa, consensually-oriented decision making was often valued and implemented in various ways (2019: 38). For example, he points out that a Village Council was often responsible for “equitable uses of land” and he argues that council members needed to be trusted by the community – otherwise they could be removed from membership of the Council or any other leadership position. He remarks that post-colonial African leaders are oft-times governing in terms of their own and foreign-led economic interests, insofar as this suits them (Adyanga, 2019: 41). Adyanga contends that the selfish interests of many current leaders in

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In September 2021, participants were invited to explore the additional question of the role of people as individuals and collective agents in making a difference to social outcomes, also in the COVID era. In exploring this question, more participants took part. The authors’ deliberations around agency are presented in Chapter 5 of this volume (Romm *et al.*, 2022).

Africa can be contrasted with ancient democratic traditions in Africa, where there were various mechanisms in place to generate a collective style of decision-making which could serve the common good, and which would expect chosen leaders to solicit community participation in decision-making. Adenkule similarly contends that “the elements and indices of democracy ... were present in one form or another in precolonial Africa” (2012: 18). According to Adekule, “African cultures infused communal values into their political practices (p. 18). Other scholars who have located such values as “present” (though not in perfect ways) in Indigenous African cultural traditions prior to colonization are, for instance: Ani (2013); Bassey (2019); Bates (2010); Chirawurah *et al.*, (2019); Matlosa (2007); Romm (2015, 2017). (These authors all argue that processes of colonization impinged negatively on such values.)

The proposals as expressed in this chapter should be read in the light of a consideration of prospects for strengthening African democracy, as part of the process of preparing for and addressing COVID-19 type pandemics. The proposals point to how people’s collective agency as citizens can input into the functioning of governance systems and also points to the role of the various NGOs in which many of the participants in the re-invent democracy project are actively involved.

In structuring the chapter, we firstly (in Section 2) offer an explanation of the purpose and importance of the TQ which was posed in 2021, and the types of Ideas that this TQ stimulated. Sections 3-8 in turn explain each specific Idea and summarize the clarifications thereof as solicited by the group (which in each case included everyone present in the Zoom meeting, including the facilitator). The clarifications and additions to the Ideas went through yet another process, in that we set up a google document so that all authors of this chapter could examine and write into the draft chapter (with the preliminary draft created by Norma Romm, who had participated in the meeting by asking clarifying questions during the discussion and who synthesized the Ideas into the overarching narrative, finalized in Section 9). This meant that all participants had the opportunity to contribute to the chapter’s construction by modifying/adding input – whether or not they had participated in the Zoom discussion of 24th August. Audiences are invited likewise to engage with the ideas as presented in the chapter, including with our synthesis and Conclusion, which are not meant to be prescriptive but to offer a sharing of Ideas such that others can decide how transferrable these are to their contexts of action (cf. Anney, 2014: 277; Romm, 2018:184; Woldegies, 2014: 89).⁵ As indicated by Msila (2017: 56), sharing is an African obligation and it is in this spirit that we have presented the ideas in this chapter.

2. The value-laden nature of the question: Triggering of valued action-oriented responses

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□ For readers to be able to assess transferability to their contexts, rich and dense descriptions/narratives need to be created – hence we have ensured in Sections 3-8 below that the richness of the Ideas and their clarifications have been detailed in this chapter.

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The TQ was formulated so that the group would concentrate on possible actions/reforms/policies that could (and should) be taken in order to become more resilient, sustainable and better prepared for future crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This was with a view to us all writing a chapter for this book title, namely, *COVID-19 Pandemic: Perspectives across Africa*. The TQ was thus tailor-made to suit this purpose. Yiannis Laouris initially set the question (after Norma mooted with the group the possibility of us creating a contribution for the book). He invited people on the WhatsApp group of the African Chapter of participants in the Re-inventing Democracy project, to reformulate the TQ if they felt that it could be better expressed in view of the book topic. But people did not venture to offer new suggestions, thus indicating their satisfaction with its formulation. What is significant about the TQ is that it is clearly not meant to be neutral in content; it is meant to urge people to consider what actions/reforms/policies our country *should* take in order to become more resilient, sustainable and better prepared for future crises. It is also requesting people to consider their local knowledge about “our country” and implicitly other ones too – with the implication of this being a country in Africa. The TQ urges people to consider what seems both feasible and imaginable in the country for the benefit of the country as a whole being more resilient etc., and not just for the benefit of a few individuals (but for the “collective good” or “common good”). Participants were requested to make their proposals SMART (Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, and Time-bounded) and peers to ask questions that would encourage them towards that end; like “how”, “who”, “when”, etc.

The setting of this TQ was an important start to the dialogical process. As indicated above, it already geared people to immediately gear their attention to how life for people as a whole in the country could be “better” if certain actions were to be taken, based on potentials that they could envisage (with a moral eye too) as feasible and imaginable. The TQ triggered a number of Ideas that were posted before the symposium on a shared virtual platform called IdeaPrism.⁶ Some participants posted more than one Idea for everyone to see (and some already included clarifications of their various ideas). The posting of the Ideas on IdeaPrism served two functions: i) it helped the participants who posted Ideas to think carefully about how the TQ could usefully be answered and ii) it helped us all (those who looked!) to start to think about our questions that we may wish to ask by way of (further) clarification.

During the actual Zoom session, the facilitator (Laouris) allowed most of the Idea-originators to answer questions from the group only in relation to **one** of their Ideas, due to time limitations. (The facilitator explained that he would rather that we do some Ideas “well and good” instead of many ideas “fast and not so good”. He also explained that the google doc would provide an opportunity for further inputs.) But two participants were given the chance during the Zoom session to refer briefly to another of their Ideas, as these seemed very linked and the clarifications were moving across the two. During the discussion we also briefly linked one of the Ideas posted by a person who could not be present during the Zoom meeting to a proposal of another (present) person, as part of the clarification process. In any case, the TQ served its purpose of generating pertinent Ideas/proposals that formed the basis of a stimulating discussion/learning encounter. It can be said that the Idea-originators learned from hearing the types of clarification questions that were posed to them (as they had to reflect more deeply in the

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⁶ The Ideas that were posted on IdeaPrism before the symposium can be found by creating an account in this App and requesting guest access to the Dialogue “Perspectives across Africa about the pandemic.”

light of the questioning) and the people listening of course learned by hearing the various responses and hearing about possibilities for concretizing the Ideas – and hopefully audiences of this chapter too will find some of the discussions relevant and inspiring for their contexts of action. In short, the TQ (as expected) stimulated the development of Ideas and a learning process around options for generating responses to crises (such as COVID-19 type pandemics) that have and might occur.

3. Idea 1: Proper resource allocation and structured road map to deal with pandemics

This Idea was contributed by Abdulkarim Taraja (from Kenya) on IdeaPrism as his first idea out of the 4 Ideas that he had posted on IdeaPrism. It was the only one that was discussed during the Zoom meeting, due to time limitations. He clarified it on IdeaPrism as: “In Africa, many governments are never adequately prepared to tackle crisis even those that reoccur year in year out. During the Budget Making process, less attention is given to any potential disasters and when these eventually happen, they look for the international community to assist, much of the resources going to few individuals in government like in the case of KEMSA scandal in Kenya in 2020 through media investigative documentary titled ‘COVID-19 Millionaires’ by the National Television (NTV Kenya)”.

During the Zoom discussion he continued to clarify that pandemics have taught us many things, such as the need to have a structured way of putting aside resources to prepare for crises. He noted that this has not been something that African countries have put a lot of effort into. He referred to global citizenship (which includes empowerment of citizens as a concept) and that it implies for him that the government and all citizens must come up with a structured way of allocating resources and make a road map to deal with crises such as pandemics. He indicated that if no budget has been set aside, it becomes a problem. In response to a question as to how citizens can become involved in the budgeting process, he stated that here in Kenya the 2010 Constitution makes provision for Budget Making in which citizens are allowed to contribute to the budget making process through the Public Participation. This offers an opening for citizens to insist and share opinions and priorities on allocating resources for use in the event of crises occurring. This is important because when COVID-19 came nobody seemed to know what to do, and which ministry is responsible for what or in charge.

In response to questions about the details of how the national budget can account for this, he suggested that a certain percentage, say, 2% of the yearly budget can be set aside to deal with crises such as pandemic(s). If by the end of the year it has not been used then as in any budget, it returns to the treasury for re-allocation. He also indicated that if it turns out that 2% is not sufficient, then extra money can be raised, for example, through international bodies such as the United Nations (UN). But having some money set aside “from the word go” would be helpful. One person queried on the chat box what kinds of crises would be prioritized, for example, let us say a crisis such as a flood occurs, and uses all the budget, how would a crisis such as the pandemic then be addressed? Abdul replied that the government would have to adjust the national budget to deal with catastrophes through the supplementary budget – such as locusts’ invasion and floods in 2019, but again if necessary international disaster funds could be drawn on.

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Another person queried (on the chat box) who would manage the fund or plan and whether there would be a committee to do so. (Here she was already offering thoughts/options for reflection.) Abdulkarim responded that, yes, indeed there must be a committee and this was one of the advantages of creating the fund in that it would be overseen by a committee. The committee then drafts the road map or simply the guidelines of how the funds should be used by the committee which will then account for the funds.

Yet another participant asked how priorities would be set – for example, could the funds be used for aiding people who lost jobs due to the pandemics? To this, Abdulkarim replied that the fund would have to be set aside for COVID-19 type health crises only – so it would be used for supplying drugs, chemicals, improving medical infrastructure and other related issues to mitigate the health effects of the pandemic. As far as cushioning citizens in terms of their economic losses, stimulus programs would have to be created by the executive and parliament, but not as part of the roadmap, which should be focused on health-related effects. This idea on resource allocation and management had also been raised by Melvis Kimbi in IdeaPrism, who noted that “Countries like Cameroon and Madagascar should have an emergency fund, voted in the national budget, and sufficient enough to cover the essential needs of the population in times of a crisis or pandemic like COVID-19.” She further expounded that “with such a budget line well-managed, they can ensure that urgently needed humanitarian assistance reaches those in need at the earliest time possible.”

4. Idea 2: Prioritize IT in development planning (short, medium or long term)

This Idea was posted on IdeaPrism by Abiba Abdallah (from Ghana). (She wore a T-shirt during the Zoom meeting which displayed her advocacy and allegiance to global citizenship.) In clarifying her Idea, she indicated that the context of her proposal is that most businesses or organizations had to go online due to Covid-19 challenges, but people were not necessarily equipped to handle this transition. She explained that as far as public organizations are concerned, IT could be used effectively in e-government and also in the educational and health sectors.

She was asked a clarification question as to how citizens could encourage the government to prioritize IT in planning – that is, how would the government become encouraged? She replied that citizens can actively become engaged in the planning process because at district level and municipal level the districts and municipalities set up dates and they invite stakeholders on board – so these could be forums for pushing for IT plans. Likewise, inter-municipal and interregional forums can also be used to push for (more) use of technology.

Another participant asked a question by noting that when people raise the issue of IT and technology in Africa or in Ghana (from which both he and Abiba come), the defense is that this could lead to further unemployment. At the moment often 3-4 people do things that one person could do (if aided by technology) and in our country illiteracy (on a technical level) is high; so, a lot of people will then not have work. So, the issue of unemployment is a concern that could be raised when one pushes for more IT. He asked: What do you say to this defense?

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Abiba replied that, yes, there are pros and cons in every situation. Some people may experience the challenge of unemployment, so there would need to be policies put in place to address the question of the manual way of doing things and the consequences of changing this. She noted that, for instance, the government is already promoting TVET (technical and vocational education and training) and she suggested that more digitalization should be encouraged so that people will be skilled in this aspect. So, in a crisis such as Corona, they would know how to go about their business – this would be a way to address the question of unemployment. Meanwhile in the educational sector (including servicing of schools) the corona virus has pointed to the importance of promoting digitalization so that those less privileged in IT could boost their skills in this sector. This would require capacity building of teachers in IT (ICT) as well as capacitating the children. As it happened, many kids were not educated for a year when Covid-19 struck. It took a year before students could go online to learn. So, learning through the internet needs to be prioritized. And this should include not only theoretical aspects but the practical aspect of how to learn online. Kids need experience from a basic level. (This could also supplement in-person teaching and learning in future.)

A participant interjected a question as to how Abiba felt that digitalization could have helped the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana – and what types of digitalization, that is, what kinds of IT did she have in mind in industry, in education, and/or health? How would this be supportive in addressing the pandemic? She answered with reference to her example from the educational sector and stated that here specifically the educational service needed to put up a system that enabled kids to go online to learn – if that initiative had been taken before COVID-19, it would have helped drastically and have reduced the number of kids who were not educated for a year.

Another participant (Norma) at this point also mentioned that Melvis Kimbi had posted an Idea on IdeaPrism which might help to further cast light on the question of the value of IT. Melvis had posted that: “In both Cameroon and Madagascar, there is a need to promote alternative working conditions such as teleworking. A large part of the population has been rendered jobless by the pandemic as all work is done manually, on site and in clusters. This means that a lot of people are still computer-illiterate and the system needs to work on building potential in the ICT domain”. Norma referred to this and asked Abiba if she would agree that if people were rendered more ICT competent this would enable them to do teleworking and so be able to get employment for example, during the pandemic, where lots of people doing manual work lost jobs. Would this fit in with Abiba’s point that some jobs may be lost if IT is pushed, but others may be created (e.g., teleworking)? Abiba replied that she agreed with that. The facilitator then mentioned that although Melvis is not here today – at the end we can read again her Idea on IdeaPrism.

5. Idea 3 (linked to Idea 4): Improve preparedness mechanisms and strategies at the local and national levels

This Idea (and a related one referred to later, namely, “Appoint independent fundraising and budget monitoring board), was posted on IdeaPrism by Abel Mavura (from Zimbabwe) and clarified by him during the symposium. He indicated that, speaking from his base in Zimbabwe, we need to come up with proper mechanisms at local and national level. He expressed concern that there may be some mechanisms to deal with crises at national level, but it is problematic when these are not applicable to

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local or rural areas where there may be specific problems that people are facing. So, we need to develop context-specific mechanisms to use when preparing for this kind of pandemic. He also stated that the government needs to come up with relevant committees because during COVID-19 a lot of things were going on including lots of corruption and the government was not able to account for some of the resources that had been used. Hence a committee is needed which will delineate what kinds of materials and resources are required to respond – responsible people need to understand what is needed and develop strategies at local and national level. What is important is that in this process the planners are in touch with the local level and the voices of marginalized people: ideas must come from below from the local people and not only involve the top level.

By way of a clarification question he was asked what concrete steps or actions would need to be taken to provide evidence that the country is prepared in the way that he was envisaging. He responded that there are several concrete actions. As part of the improvement of preparedness, the government would need to prove that they have people who are capable to implement strategies at national and local level. He mentioned that the national government is usually not able to handle things from their offices without understanding the communities and the areas that need specific actions – which need to be different in different provinces to take account of local conditions and cultures. The facilitator wrote anonymously in the chat box (and asked Abel) how we would know that a country meets the preparedness criteria. What are the indicators – money, equipment, people? What? That is, is it possible to propose a checklist to “measure” how well prepared a country is? Abel responded that budgets is a basic benchmark and resources too in the form of equipment, and committees need to be set up that are responsible for mobilizing the resources and reporting back to Parliament on this. They would have to show that this is the material we have in place and how it can be distributed and who is going to receive it – is there enough for everyone? Someone else wrote in the chat box by way of a question: “How will citizens be involved so they can hold government accountable should there be any failure”? Abel did not directly respond to this, but another participant followed up and asked how the government would be encouraged to become more “well prepared” – how would people’s voices be heard – that is, how could the government be motivated to respond to these (also given his earlier statement about corruption and people maybe not wanting to be accountable for the way budgets are spent)? (The person who had asked the related question on the chat box indicated that this was similar to her question phrasing.)

In answer to this “how” question, Abel stated that this moves into his second Idea, namely, the need for a budget monitoring committee, which will help in the reporting process. This he indicated would help to fight against corruption – for this we would need an Independent Board constituted by people from different parts of society and from different organizations and also people representing the voices of the people not coming from the ruling party. An independent board could ensure that the government accounts for the resources and implements things correctly.

This led to the question of whether the government would agree to set up this independent board. Abel responded that, yes, they would agree because this can be done through Parliament – where there are other people (other than the ruling party) contributing, and the ruling party has to listen to people from opposition members and people representing those who come from different backgrounds.

The next person was then asked to choose their best idea and one they felt most relevant with impact for the pandemic.

6. Idea 5: Building sustainable livelihoods for youth through urban farming

This idea was presented by Apollo Murigi (from Kenya). It was one of the 4 Ideas that he had posted beforehand on IdeaPrism. He indicated that in addressing pandemics, it is not only the government but also civil society and communities that play an important role. He referred to an organization (Miss Koch Kenya) where he was managing a number of programs – with entrepreneurship being one such program. As part of this program one of the approaches to livelihoods (with other values such as nutrition alongside this) has been to use space-conscious farming techniques such as vertical gardening and mushroom farming in urban areas (specifically informal settlements). Apart from the organization engaging youth in livelihood activities in the fields of dance and the Arts, they are taught skills in urban farming. This proved to be crucial when Covid-19 happened. That is, because many jobs associated with the Arts and music became rendered redundant during COVID-19 (e.g., DJ jobs which need a club), these people might have been rendered unemployed. But with a number of other civil society organizations, they had all come together and introduced the youth to urban farming in urban spaces. So, for example, in a space of 10x10 meters, 30 people can get a livelihood from mushroom farming if this is done properly. The idea, plus other forms of farming, has proved successful in building sustainable livelihoods through empowering women and youth. To date, 180 youth and 220 women have been involved.

One of the participants (from Ghana) indicated that she loved this idea and that she had been involved in a similar project in certain urban areas with urban farming. But she now wondered about how one can cater for more remote areas – how could we help them to promote the marketing process? She mentioned that to take care of themselves and sell their produce, they had to travel far.

Apollo responded that thanks to this participant (Abiba's) involvement in the organization called Move the World, and thanks to her introducing him to another person in this organization (the co-founder of it), he had set up a meeting with the latter to indeed discuss this issue as relevant to Ghana as well as Kenya. The initiative that he had already started (as part of Miss Koch Kenya) in Kenya was to train the youth in e-marketing – using media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter – to secure orders for their produce. That is, youth and women are trained to market their produce online. He also mentioned that he had also organized a pilot project in a pastoralist area in Kenya, for setting up kitchen gardens in primary schools and in TVET so as to reduce their expenditure for food for the institutions and the community, which has an economic impact as well as a nutritional impact. So, it enhances food security. It is a process of continuous learning in schools and in households. He mentioned that this initiative started with a single organization (the one where he is program manager) and now they have 14 organizations that have joined (involving 37 Counties in Kenya). He emphasized that these are bottom-up initiatives which citizens have started and not the government. It is initiated by the communities and it is sustainable – and has high impact for people in terms of livelihoods, food security and nutrition, relative to the resources that are put in. (Micro-finance loans are sometimes put in place to help the start-ups.)

The facilitator referred in the chat box to another example of this – in relation to energy generation in Europe, which makes communities more independent in the case of electric crises: this, he noted, boosts the local economy while rendering people more resilient. He asked Apollo whether these ideas could spread to other countries in Africa, and Apollo then mentioned that this is do-able through partnerships; that is, if we come together with other organizations, in relatively low-cost kinds of operations, we can reach more countries. To this end, he has recently been liaising with the co-founder of Move the World in Ghana (thanks to his becoming connected with Abiba via the re-invent democracy project, who is involved in this organization). Furthermore, thanks to his connection with Abel Mavura (founder of Marvel Acts Youth Organization, MAYO) from Zimbabwe through the re-invent democracy project, plans are underway. He stated that they are merging the areas in which they work and implementing in our respective countries. He mentioned that such activities can be strengthened through applying for joint proposals on the basis of ideas that are already running, which are easier to fundraise for – so we can reach more countries than we have reached so far.

Another participant asked whether there needs to be put in place by the government some policies or laws that would make it easier for such initiatives to spread. Apollo replied that it would be helpful if the government made it easier for youth groups and women’s groups to register themselves as entities. This will legitimate their work and give it a legal basis so when they engage in this, they do not risk some people taking the profit and running away. So legal structures would be helpful. And, of course, if the government could subsidize some of the material to start with (such as seeds and seedlings) this would be helpful as a way of cushioning beneficiaries in crises, such as COVID-19 or other crises. For example, the start-up capital for mushroom farming is quite expensive, but once up and running it provides a livelihood. (He posted on the chat box in response to the question how the government might be supportive that “Yes, adopting this model as a national intervention either by law or as a practice would be especially great! It would lead to independence of the country in more ways than just food security.)

7. Idea 6: Prioritizing the making of corruption unattractive

This Idea, along with another one (about strengthening health systems and infrastructure of various African countries) was placed in the chat box by Bill Graham Osei Akomea (from Ghana). He was encouraged by the facilitator to focus on this Idea because the next person to speak had posted a similar idea to his one regarding the health system – so the facilitator suggested that it would be very interesting to discuss his Idea on corruption as we do not have anything about corruption so far. The facilitator mentioned that in Cyprus a lot of people became millionaires because of the pandemic (with corruption involved.) So, this is an angle not to miss. Bill proceeded to present his Idea and stated that he framed the Idea as *making corruption unattractive*. He clarified his Idea as follows:

In our part of the world [Africa] this is deadlier than the Corona virus itself. It is something endemic in the system – not only politicians and government officials; it is also in ordinary citizens who practice it. This pandemic now gives us the opportunity to sit up, for example, as a country such as Ghana to tackle corruption. In this COVID-19 season there are lots of issues that have come up that expose the corrupt nature of our society. For instance, donor organizations came to assist the country and the

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government also set up a COVID-19 fund and a lot of private companies contributed to the fund – but if you ask the ordinary citizen if they are satisfied with how the fund has been used, about 90% will say no – because of lack of transparencies. Even though the fund managers are highly reputable people who have distinguished themselves, but ordinary Ghanaians think this fund was not well utilized – that boils down to corruption. The fund was supposed to be used to provide equipment etc., in the hospitals, but these are still not in the hospitals – so people ask, where did the money go?

There is a fee if you enter Ghana, you must do a COVID test – some of us think the fee is too much at 50 dollars to test for Covid – in Germany the test kits are available and cheap and some are done for free – in Ghana, Ghanaians pay 50 dollars and non-Ghanaians pay 150 dollars. The worst-case scenario is people confirming negative, but the authorities insisting that they are positive. People have evidence that they were actually negative, but tested positive – one woman tested herself live on social media and the results were negative, but the authorities said they are positive. Perhaps, just perhaps, the numbers we see and read on the news may be inflated to call for sympathy from foreign donors. But that point aside, look at people selling government-donated or private-donated equipment for money – hand sanitizers and masks for money. Meanwhile, when COVID-19 was at its peak, people increased their prices and did not think of their neighbors whether they could afford it – things that can make us all live (such as sanitizers).

This is deadlier than pandemic – so the government should prioritize the tackling of corruption. If corruption was not an issue, we would not have felt the pandemic as much as we did. The government did appoint a special prosecutor to deal with people, especially government officials, who commit acts of corruption, but the first person appointed blamed the government of corruption and as interfering with his work. Now a second person has been appointed and we all (across social divisions in the society) think this person can probably do this work well.

However, apart from an office that is tasked with tackling corruption, we need to go to the grassroots to school level and *sensitize children about the dangers of corruption* and inculcate attitudes in them that see corruption as anti-social and anti-moral: when these kids who grow up, they can then govern the country in terms of this morality. From the basic level this needs to be put into the school curriculum so that from primary level, kids will learn about the dangers of corruption. If attitudes change from that level, then we can be assured of a future where corruption is a thing of the past.

Here he paused for questions, and Apollo at this point wrote in the chat box that he thought Kenya was a unique case, where we had COVID billionaires! Companies registered to trade in cereals ended up supplying the government face masks at 10 USD for a single mask!

The facilitator asked incognito in the chat box, so how do we take advantage of COVID-19 to expose corruption and how do we fight it? He expressed the point that changing the curriculum at school level can take 20 years before the kids grow up; so, what can be done concretely now? He mentioned that we have seen corruption in prices, in the positive/negative tests, in companies who become equipment companies overnight, etc. Is the government just watching – how can we fight it, or to address Bill's phrasing, how can we make it **not** attractive when people make so much money?

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Bill replied that this is a difficult question! That is why he decided to perhaps look at generations to come. If they are socialized into a set of values that made them aware how anti-social corruption is, this would make it unattractive to them. But of course, if we focus on the kids only, we will lose our generation, which we cannot do. So, some concrete steps for now are to say that:

- i) Transparency should be improved – for instance, with the COVID fund, it is because of the issue of transparency that people did not trust the funds were managed well – what went into the expenditure? Or as another example, even with the COVID test – how much were we paying for the test – what goes into the costing? It is because people had the perception that billions of dollars were being made from the test, that they were dissatisfied.
- ii) Stricter and equal punishment are clearly also important to deal with those found to be corrupt. Obviously, every country has laws that punish people who practice corruption such as stealing or having money not accounted for, massaging figures, etc. – but when it comes to equality before the law, this is a problem – the big man often does not get punished. So we need to enforce the laws to the letter and make equal punishment.
- iii) The social media and increased use of them will help. For example, the COVID-19 test at the airport where figures were massaged, this was evidence from social media where the person tested herself live on social media and it came out negative; that is what social media does – so strengthening social media will expose some of the corruption. Access to information is very important. It is a pity, he noted, that he heard that some countries are banning some social media at times, so people do not get access to information. This is problematic because this is one way of exposing corruption because nowadays smart phones are cheap to afford: It should actually be easy to get access to information which is a human right.⁷
- iv) Another practical action to tackle corruption is education, not just in schools but also in government and other enterprises: people should be educated as to what is going on. For example, with the vaccine procurement, it transpired that the health minister had procured vaccines using a middle man to whom huge sums of money were paid. He stated on oath

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□ On the issue of the right to information, in an earlier (2019) Skype conversation held between Bill and Norma, he had mentioned to her that this is not easy, even in democratic systems. He stated using Ghana as an example, that people raise Ghana as an example of democracy in Africa, but their right to information bill had been in parliament for more than 15 years, until last year [2018] that it was passed. Norma asked: “Do you think it is from pressure from citizens or pressure from lawyers? Why did it get passed?”, to which Bill replied that it was pressure from all civil society organizations and lawyers as well. Norma asked where he was part of that and he answered in the affirmative. Norma asked if he was pressing as a collective of lawyers (she knew he was a lawyer). He replied that he did it individually: “For example, there was the use of social media. I joined the social media group and when I had a forum, I added my opinions to the fight. And also, through some contributions that were made on radio, on programs related to the passage of the right to information law”. In any case, this indicates the potential to “push” for the right to information (which is part of Bill’s suggested transparency requirement for curbing corruption).

that no money was paid – but later a letter was discovered asking for a refund, which showed that money had been paid.

- v) These are some ways of curbing corruption; but in the long run Bill urged us to look at the kids! The facilitator replied that he was always a visionary trying to get to the root of the problem.

The next person was then invited to present her Idea (and later he suggested that she could also add her second idea which was related to the first)

8. Idea 7 (linked to Idea 8): Improve on the quality of health care facilities and access

Rahab Wairimu (from Kenya) had posted this Idea along with another one on IdeaPrism. During the symposium she started off by clarifying her Idea to improve the quality of health care and also make this accessible to more people. She referred to the Kenyan context and stated that if we look geographically, we can see that certain areas are not covered by the health care system and also economically not everyone is served by the system because of the costs. So geographically there is a need to put up more facilities/medical Centers that are equipped and ensure there are sufficient personnel – that is, health care facilities to cover all areas and all socio-economic classes. In the medical system if we look back at the pandemic, if we had had enough facilities, we would have been better able to fight the infection and the system would not have become overwhelmed. So, a step ahead in containing the virus (and future ones) rests on improving the quality of health care and ensuring that this is accessible to all.

One of the participants asked a “how” question – that is, how did Rahab envisage that the government could be encouraged to do as she suggested? – how could pressure be put on the government to make sure that everyone would have health access in the case of this or another pandemic? Would the government be likely to agree that they could pour resources into ensuring high quality health care and full coverage across all geographical areas and all people who needed health care when the virus was rampant? Would it perhaps not be wiser to invest in medical technology that is more preventative, where research could be done on infectious diseases and how to better deal with them? The participant mentioned that these kinds of options had been placed on IdeaPrism in various formulations. While Rahab was replying, the facilitator noted on the chat box in support of her first Idea that “In Cyprus we established a national health program just months before the pandemic. If that was NOT there, a lot more people would have died”. He also mentioned on the chat box that what was being suggested related to “the other Idea that she [herself] had posted about preventing infections”.

Rahab stated that yes, she had placed such an Idea and had phrased it as: “Invest in Research and Development on Infectious Emerging Pathogens”. This could indeed be a preventative measure – but one problem is that the COVID-19 pandemic was not predictable. Nevertheless, she stated that it is important to do such research on pathogens and their likelihood of arising and also how they can be dealt with whether on a preventative level or how to better tackle them medically if/when they do arise. She mentioned that Kenya has had to deal with Ebola and COVID-19 and by now we should have recognized that there has not been much effort put into research on pathogens. We need research not

just on medicines for medical conditions that are currently being researched, but around infectious emerging diseases. This goes back to the use of funds and at the moment funds are not being invested in this. She suggested that it does not necessarily have to be the government that gets funds to invest in this – it can be NGOs. But instead of just focusing on normal medicines the focus could be (also) on pathogens. The participant asked if she had an NGO in mind and she said yes, there are many health-related NGOs operating in Kenya and a particularly relevant one could be the one called “I Choose Life,” which has headquarters in Kenya. This NGO, for example, could add this Idea to their program of doing research.

Another related Idea that had been placed on IdeaPrism by Melvis Kimbi concerned what she called “Weak and Non-Existent Health Surveillance Systems”, that is, the absence of health surveillance systems at borders to better manage pandemics. She had noted that “The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that countries (in Africa) still have very weak/non-existent health surveillance systems along borders that can help check movement and ensure contact-tracing in case of a pandemic.” Indeed, in managing the pandemic, many countries did not seem to prioritize this basic public health procedure, be it at the internal level when it comes to declared cases or again at border crossings, giving way to more spread of the virus. In further explaining her point, she noted that “this is the case in Cameroon and other Central African countries where the lack of robust surveillance systems in times of epidemics/pandemics have allowed for the fast spread of diseases, like Ebola. And it has not been any different with COVID-19”.

The facilitator suggested that we now had a range of Ideas from the group (with each one presenting at least one of their Ideas) – and this would be a good point to close the meeting. He expressed that he was excited that the Ideas were to-the-point and rich and already sufficient to share with audiences. And the google doc to be posted as a draft for the chapter would be an opportunity for anyone to edit it.

9. Some pointers drawing together the Ideas in an overarching narrative (with additional references to relevant literature)

In this section we provide an overarching synthesized narrative of what we can say that Corona has exposed, and what lessons we as a group have harvested, which we share with African and global citizens as options for taking us into a better future. To construct our narrative, we also refer to some relevant literature. We start with the issue of corruption, which was a theme threading through nearly all the participants’ clarifications of their Ideas. The theme was expressed in various guises: for example, in pointing to the potential for citizen participation in the budget-making process to prepare for crises, along with accountable government bodies to deal with resources and to define how they are to be used (Abdulkarim Taraja); in urging the setting up of committees responsible to mobilize resources for crises and report to Parliament (Abel Mavura); in pointing to examples of COVID-19 millionaires and billionaires (Abdulkarim Taraja, Apollo Murigi and Bill Akomea) and how the corruption that was exposed during the pandemic expressed the blatant immorality of people’s not caring about the deadly effect of this corruption (for example, overpricing of sanitizers that would be a life-saver). Bill’s detailed clarifications of his Idea during the symposium offered suggestions for “making corruption unattractive”. Bill referred to four ways in which this might be tackled in our current generation, but indicated that the prospects for addressing it could best be served through

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educating the new generation in a different manner, specifically including the immoral and anti-social effects of corruption into the school curriculum.

Interestingly, in the South African context, the government in 2012 introduced a national workbook series for school children in all 11 official languages, where the morality of *Ubuntu* was built into the workbooks. Ubuntu is an African philosophy with an attendant morality that advocates caring, compassion, and relationships of reciprocity as part of a feeling of being connected to others and to “all that exists” in the web of life. (For a discussion on Ubuntu, see Section 2, Chapter 16 of his volume authored by Adyanga, Romm, and Johnson). McKay, who headed the team creating the South African workbooks, explains that instead of a *hidden curriculum* which is often operative in schools and which implicitly encourages children to be self-oriented and competitive in seeking individual success (as in many Western and other contexts, including educational systems in former-colonized societies), one can introduce what she calls a *parallel curriculum* (2018). Such a curriculum inspires discussion on, and practices associated with, moral values in all aspects of the curriculum (McKay, 2018). This is done through stories that are threaded through the workbooks, which show the role players caring for each other and for the environment, with questions inviting discussion around this. Another example – from the domain of IT– is CYBER KIDS’ curriculum, which intermingles technology concepts with the mental development that should take place while delivering a particular module, along with examples of the social value and the importance of this specific knowledge in real-life, a concept encapsulated as KnowledgePackets (Laouris, 2014). This would also be compatible with Veugelers and De Groot’s noting that across the globe there are different notions of what a “citizen” is and that postcolonial studies (e.g., Torres, 2017) go beyond a conventional Western perspective of citizenship by emphasizing “social justice and societal transformation” as being an important component of citizenship education (Veugelers and de Groot, 2019: 16).

What Bill’s proposal adds to, while extending, these notions, is that the curriculum can focus specifically on the *immoral and anti-social effects of corruption*, so that children become socialized from the start to recognize how deadly this can be to others (in that resources that could be used to serve people become plundered, goods that could save people’s lives become overpriced, etc.). Corona has exposed the deadly effects of practices of corruption and brought to light the need to include this in our curricula (whether in Africa or indeed in other contexts too, for readers to consider as an option).

Gergen’s book on *Relational Being* (2009) and his chapter with Scherto (2020) on educational evaluation, points to the importance of education across the globe being more geared in the direction of helping people to experience the fulfillment of *collaborative efficacy* (working fruitfully towards a common goal), thus discouraging what Bill calls anti-social behavior. Likewise, the book edited by McIntyre-Mills, Corcoran-Nantes and Wirawan (2022, forthcoming) entitled *The Elgar companion to transformative education for regenerative development* also takes this line. Insofar as conventional Western-oriented approaches to schooling which prize individual self-efficacy have become infused in countries across Africa, this has not augured well for children seeing themselves as moral citizens, grounded in a *sense of themselves as essentially relational beings, connected with the world around them*, and not as separate individual entities. Magdoff and Williams likewise argue that to reach a socially just and ecologically healthy world, humans need to be socialized in terms of a recognition of our connectedness with others, so as “to enable prosocial behavior patterns to become dominant, and antisocial behavior, so prized and rewarded in capitalist societies, to fade into the background” (2017:

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195). This would mean, in Bill's terms, that people no longer consider a corrupt route to making money as "attractive", as they would experience this as anathema to their (socialized) feeling of connectedness to others.

A related point raised by Bill was that sanitizers (for instance) became overpriced during COVID-19, and thus proved deadly – showing the lack of care of the business proprietors. And Apollo remarked that companies registered to trade in cereals ended up supplying the government face masks at 10 USD for a single mask – also indicating "business" practices that manifest an excessive profit motive based on corrupt tendering, *at the expense of caring for the consequences* in terms of looting public resources. What this points to again is that the (Western-inspired) model of humans as "homo economicus" – geared to fulfilling their economic self-interests – has come to dominate our economies (and the global economy). Murove argues that it is regrettable that certain "early modern economists attempted to divest economics from morality" and in this process the "idea of sympathy as social logic" was "hardened into a theory of self-interest" (Murove 2005: 154). Murove, like other authors before and after him, regrets the prevalence of this economic model and its effects in making people believe that selfish behavior is acceptable in "business". In this regard McIntyre-Mills argues that breaking with "business as usual"-type economic models is crucial in reconsidering how we can shift current economic trends post COVID (or in the COVID-19 era) to render people more passionate and compassionate as part of "doing business" (2020: 827). This tallies with Arko-Achemfuor and Dzansi's account (2016) of doing *good* business. Apollo's discussion on urban farming, with all his clarifications, also points to an allegiance to notions of livelihood as tied to a sense of community and a sense of contributing to a better life in the community not in terms of individual people getting maximum profit but in terms of developing a local economy to serve people, including their nutritional needs and also not to destroy the planet in the process (hence the green vertical farming intention, for instance).

Apart from this, Abiba's suggestions as to how citizens can push for government to prioritize IT, is a way of mitigating the digital divide and the privileges associated with it, while aiding people in various sectors (including rural farmers in remote areas) to be economically and educationally included and skilled for working during and post-COVID-19. Rahab concentrated on how systems of health care could be rendered more inclusive, including people across geographical and socioeconomic groupings, while also indicating why and how research into infectious pathogens could and should be activated (e.g., by extending the remit of current health research). And Melvis pointed to other needed measures such as health surveillance systems at national borders to check movement and organize contact tracing in order to help manage pandemics such as Corona and others which may arise.

These were some of home-grown local solutions offered by the participants based on their insider knowledge of assets that can be strengthened, with the help of networks of organizations and of people committed to generating resilient and inclusive societies. The participants felt that overall Corona has taught us lessons by starkly exposing vulnerabilities and inequalities, and they offered suggestions for turning these lessons into opportunities for developing more resilient, sustainable and better prepared societies to address crises such as Covid-analogous pandemics – as part of the creation of a better, more inclusive social and ecologically-attuned existence.

10. Conclusion

In this chapter we drew collective wisdom from the various participants' Ideas and Clarifications thereof, also in relation to other participants' questions. We explained the mixed media methods that were drawn upon to set up and organize the discussion. The media were: WhatsApp™, Doodle™, Google calendar™, email, IdeaPrism™, Zoom™ and Google Docs™ – all used with the intention of us harvesting a set of rich ideas to share with wider audiences interested in joining the effort to strengthen our work as global citizens. This already attests to how the digital age and use of technology can incite and facilitate a re-invention of democracy, and in this case the sharing of ideas as to how citizens and governments can develop democratic solutions to crises, as a process of people learning together towards forwarding (in our various domains of individual and collective action) an allegiance to the “common good”. All of the Ideas, and also the synergy between them, point to a vision of society where people – such as these participants – are committed to organizing an inclusive society wherein the welfare of people along with planetary welfare are accounted for. The TQ that was formulated provided a trigger for participants together to share and discuss visions of a mode of our being together in society (and with the planet) where the motive of enhancing overall wellbeing and not a pure profit (self-oriented) motive is exemplified in practice. The “who”, “how”, “when” and other questions of their peers have significantly increased the SMART-ness and comprehensiveness of their proposals. One cannot resist but to wonder whether a council of ministers or a national strategy committee would have produced a significantly more concise and effective list of actions compared to what 6 young people produced during a 2h structured deliberation process. This highlights the power of structured dialogue to harness the wisdom of the actors on the ground and to produce knowledge and proposals for actions that are comparable to those of experts. We have tried as a group to point to some ways in which citizens and government can instantiate this array of Ideas – based on lessons that we have learned from COVID-19 pandemic, which we have highlighted in our discussion.

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Human history has been befallen by a long chain of famines, epidemics, and pandemics. During this current COVID-19 pandemic, our world remains under-prepared to predict, detect, respond, prevent infectious disease outbreaks, and a *fortiori* pandemics - whether naturally occurring, accidental, or deliberately released. These threats endanger lives, disrupt families and societies, and wreak havoc on economies. They represent the ultimate equal opportunity condition! They do not respect national boundaries, do not discriminate between different ethnicities, religions, social or economic status or even age, and can spread rapidly jeopardizing the health, security, and prosperity of all world countries. Indeed, physical distance alone no longer provides protection as pathogens can move from one point on Earth to almost any other place in the world within less than 36 hours! Yet, the cost of failing to control outbreaks, ruining and losing lives, destabilizing the social fabric, and decimating economies is considerably greater than the cost of prevention. It is therefore in each country's security interest to strengthen global health security and manage the risk of infectious disease outbreaks that might further develop into full-blown pandemics. Having hosted several variants of the original causal coronavirus, this global warning applies particularly to the African continent where health security needs particular highlighting, multidisciplinary engagement and multisector coordination need strengthening, and financial preparedness is direly needed. Against this background, COVID-19 was naturally selected as the main theme for the 2020-2021 SASA International Conference that was jointly co-hosted by the Society for the Advancement of Science in Africa, the Uganda Ministry of Health, and other partners (World Health Organization). This volume encapsulates a range of perspectives and associated recommendations. The health as well as socio-economic challenges glaringly manifested by the pandemic are discussed for preparation and control to render African societies more resilient including response and treatment to meet the African contexts; education and transformation to address poverty concerns; envisaging and shaping new futures to cater for a more holistic and inclusive wellbeing; and adoption of scientific innovation to meet future demands for disease control.



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