



Reports monitoring covid-19 pandemic in countries and regions of the Global South Nº 1

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A first look into the pandemic in the Global South

Since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic in China and several European countries, those of us who work in human development cooperation, could not avoid shifting our attention towards the Global South countries. We could not avoid wondering what would the pandemic mean for them and which would be its consequences.

Currently covid-19 has reached almost every corner of the planet, except 13 countries, out of which 10 are islands or archipelagos in the Pacific Ocean. Every Latino American and African country (with the exception of Lesotho) has already reported positive cases of covid-19. The first declared case in the African continent was the 14th of February in Egypt. This country is still in date the second of the continent with more confirmed cases 9,746 and the deathliest with 533 deaths. The country with a higher incidence of the pandemic is South Africa with 10,652 confirmed cases but only 206 deaths (data from *the European Center for Disease Control*).

The first declared case in Latino America was the 26th of February in Brazil which is nowadays the country of the subcontinent with the higher incidence with 168,331 confirmed cases and 11,519 deaths. The following countries with higher covid-19 incidence are Peru and Mexico with 68,882 and 36,327 confirmed cases, and 1,961 and 3,573 deaths respectively (data from the *European Center for Disease Control*).

Every country has sovereignly decided how to face the pandemic and the responses have been widely diverse: From a total confinement in countries such as Rwanda when there were 17 positive cases detected, to a “first wealth then health” policy disregarding any restriction in mobility, such as in Brazil.

The governance in a country however, is not only national but also regional. In the former case, the States of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro which have a high incidence of the pandemic, declared confinement measures omitting the president’s indications.

There have been also responses at local level. As set out by the Anthropologist and Professor Mònica Martínez from the *University of Barcelona*, the Guna community living on the islands of Kuna Yala in Panama, suspended any type of external trade (with the exception of exchanging goods) as soon as the *World Health Organization* officially decreed the worldwide pandemic the 11th of March. They have also replaced touristic activities offered in the Islands for agricultural activities for their own consumption.

The measures promoted by confinement policies, such as the social distancing or the personal hygiene are not always possible in every context. It is assessed that 238 Million people live in informal settlements in Africa. The spaced cohabited is on average in 4m² for 8 people (UNSTATS, 2018). Most of the habitants of these informal settlements make their living in the

informal economy, thus if they cannot leave their households and work they cannot feed their families. The informal economy is not only the main living source in informal settlements. The *International Labour Organization* estimates that 85,5% of Africa's economy is informal, being a higher percentage for countries in the Horn of Africa. Hence, confinement measures that force people staying home without ensuring them minimum economic conditions could potentially develop a deathlier epidemic than covid-19, hunger.

Another measure taken by countries in order to stop the pandemic includes the closure of the national borders. In Africa, there are several border regions where nomadic livestock populations live and who have seen their lifestyle affected. With the closure, they cannot carry out the transhumance of their cattle and sell their products in the market of the neighbouring country. That is the case for instance in the bordering regions of West Ethiopia and East Sudan, South Somalia and North-East Kenya or North Tanzania and South Kenya.

The economy of many families has been affected not only because of the confinement measures within their country, but also the confinement measures in other countries. The job loss or the health deterioration of their emigrated family members has originated a reduction on the periodical remittances. For example, it is estimated that during 2020 the remittances between the United States and Centre America will decrease by 3%, representing a total of 77,000 Million dollars not sent. Such reduction can be problematic especially for countries such as Honduras, Guatemala and Haiti where remittances are an important share of their Gross Domestic Product. Although policies and actions taken in order to face covid-19 pandemic are mostly sovereignly, their consequences have a global effect.

To sum up, it is as important to understand and fight the pandemic in European countries as it is to do it in African and Latino American countries. In particular, countries where although they carry deficiencies in the health, infrastructural and political system, they gather experience in epidemic's management and have an admirable resilience as a society.

References:

United Nations Statistics Division. Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (2018). Available from: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/Goal-11/>.

The research group BIOCOS-SC from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia is in contact with different research groups and governmental offices in order to jointly predict the evolution of the pandemic covid-19. Moreover, we follow up local media in 35 African countries and 9 Latino American countries and complemented it with interviews to field experts.

<https://biocomsc.upc.edu/en/covid-19>