



Reports monitoring covid-19 pandemic in countries and regions of the Global South

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How has covid-19 affected some African borders?

Boundaries are geographical limits of political entities or legal jurisdictions, such as governments, sovereign states, federal states or other sub-national entities that are established through agreements between the entities that control the border areas.

The modern concept of border that we use nowadays originated in the 16th century in the current European territories. These separations sought to mark external boundaries and to administratively unify the internal territories. However, it was not until the period between wars in the 20th century that borders served to stop the exchange of economic and cultural goods between the different countries at war.

The African continent, with a surface area of 30,310,000 km², currently has a total of 110 state and inter-state borders stretching over a total of 83,500 km. These borders were created during the colonial period at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Hence, for a quarter of a century, between 1885 and 1909, the great European powers (mainly England and France and to a lesser extent Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Italy and Spain) drew most of the borders that are now in force. It is worth mentioning that previous to that period, borders in Africa existed as a social phenomenon that governed relationships between people and communities, but not as the European concept of nation state (Atalaya, 2020).

After the independence processes, in 1964, all member states of the *Organization of African Unity* decided to commit themselves to perpetuate the borders as they were. However, the existence of these colonialist borders has been and remains one of the central reasons for instability and violence within and between the states. It is estimated that since 1964, 57% of the world's border disputes have taken place in Africa and that 61% of the African population has at some point suffered from armed conflict (Atalaya, 2020).

However, African borders also have a permeable character through which the population transits, migrates, trades or even organizes guerrillas. Cross-border regions are in many cases areas where population lives slightly outside the structure of states and where the sealing of national borders due to covid-19 has affected their *modus vivendi*. This is the case, of nomadic shepherds in areas bordering western Ethiopia and eastern Sudan, southern Somalia and northern eastern Kenya or northern Tanzania and southern Kenya. In the latter border area, in Tanzania, live sedentary Maasai populations who normally sell their livestock in Kenya and who now see their economic activity in danger.

In this report we describe some consequences due to the closure of national borders in order to control the transmission of covid-19. The following map shows the state borders discussed in this article.



Figure 1. African inter-state borders we discuss in this report

The countries of the *East African Community (EAC)*, which are Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Southern Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, have among them a strong commercial activity. At the end of April, a problem arose among the truckers of the different countries: initially the *Ugandan Ministry of Health*, due to the high number of positive cases of covid-19 that Kenya and Tanzania as well as their truckers reported, decided to implement a new policy. This consisted of having the trucks driven by a Ugandan transporter once they reached the border. The *Kenya Transporters Association* claimed that this would increase the price and time of loading and proposed that transporters should be tested at the border.

The first two weeks of May tests were conducted in the *EAC* borders. During these fifteen days the *Kenyan Ministry of Health* refused 23 Tanzanian transporters to enter the country because they tested positive. Also, the *Ministry of Health of Uganda* was left without enough test kits which caused long queues up to 65km at different border points of the country.

Following these incidents, the *EAC* countries reached an agreement on May 17th where in order to reduce distrust on transporters they would be tested in their home country by the

relevant transport company and *Ministry of Health*. Then, they would only perform their work if the test result was negative.

The social reactions on this agreement were very positive. The fruit and vegetable sector in Tanzania expressed in *The Citizen* newspaper that the agreement with Kenya saved the sector as the paralysation of its products' transport was putting it in danger. The sector annually exports fruit, vegetables and flowers worth 500 million dollars in Kenya and employs 4 million Tanzanians, mostly young people and women.

However, during the month of June, improvements in the interstate import and export of goods were yet not felt. Especially, in Kenya and Rwanda with respect to Tanzanian transporters who have been being denied entry because they did not trust on their negative covid-19 national certifications.

Despite state bans on cross-border human movement, there have been several reported cases of people crossing borders. Several Ugandans from the south part of the country and Malawians from the northeast part of the country have crossed into Tanzania to buy food and drinks. Also in the south of the Republic of Guinea, as reported by the newspaper *Guinee News*, there is a border region with Ivory Coast and Liberia where since the beginning of the quarantine their inhabitants have been entering Guinea and buying food at cheaper prices.

The president of Ethiopia, aware of their dependence on maritime imports arriving through Djibouti, has been since early June building a facility at a border point between the two countries to test and isolate, if necessary, truckers coming and going from Djibouti.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Madagascar has resolved to reinforce the maritime borders in the northwest part of the country as this is the area where most external boats land, especially from Comoros and Mayotte. Still, the country has created militarily controlled intra-state borders defined on the basis of regional incidence of covid-19. The aim is to prevent migratory movements within the country from areas with a higher incidence to areas with a lower incidence. However, there have been internally displaced persons escaping from high incidence regions who have taken dangerous routes through mountains and rivers to avoid military controls.

In the north of Namibia, there are schools normally attended by Angolan pupils. At the beginning of June, after the last grades were reopened, many Angolan students crossed the border into Namibia to attend classes. Nonetheless, the local Namibian police located them and put them in quarantine. The two governments are now developing a strategy to enable students to attend classes without their displacement risking transmission of covid-19 to local communities.

Moreover in Namibia, due to restrictions on exports of medical supplies from South Africa, many medical centres and pharmacies reported in *The Namibian* newspaper that they are facing a serious lack of medical supplies. This lack of supplies is affecting hospitalized patients as well as those chronically suffering from diabetes or hypertension.

Finally, Senegal and Mauritania during May strengthened their border controls at strategic points of entry and exit of people and material goods. In this way, they prevented people from entering the country on the one hand and from importing or exporting goods in an irregular manner on the other.

In conclusion, in order to control the transmission of covid-19, several African borders have been sealed and militarized. This has had effects at local level such as on cross-border communities or people buying or going to school across the border, as well as at national level with the disruption of imports and exports of goods.

References:

Atalayar. Borders in Africa. 2020. Available: <https://atalayar.com/content/las-fronteras-de-%C3%A1frica>

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>