
International Webinar on Public Health Policy-Making in Africa: What Lessons to Be Learnt from the COVID-19 Pandemic?

28 October 2022, 08:00 – 11:00 GMT (UTC)

During the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic when the potential disruptive impact on society seemed overwhelming prognostics were particularly dire for the Africa continent. It was predicted that African populations would be hit by the virus in such devastating ways that would trigger a cascade of social, political and economic catastrophe. However, two and half years later, these bleak scenarios did not come to pass. In fact, WHO data of May 2022 show that Africa, a heavily populated continent, has far lower number of confirmed cases, i.e. less than 9 million (8,972,475), in comparison to other parts of the world, e.g. 21 million in Eastern Mediterranean, 156 million in the Americas, and 220 million in Europe.

Throughout the pandemic, the world sought protection using vaccines, and many countries launched their own vaccine programs in a race that resulted in a multiplicity of vaccines of varying efficiencies. However, national interest could limit fairer global distribution. Prospective means to share treatments and vaccines with Africa, didn't materialize. Africa as a whole was left with few initiatives. In this process, Africa's total dependency on external science and technology is stark; in terms of research and development of vaccines and treatments, manufacturing and distribution of drugs, best practice public health decision making, and infrastructure to successfully implement health-related policies.

However, the question remains: How did Africa Continent cope with the COVID-19 pandemic despite the predictions? How did African public health institutions, health researchers and traditional healers operate at the pick of the pandemic crisis? What were their findings in terms of Africa's own cultural resources in promoting public health?

Indeed, traditional African philosophy, knowledge and practices of public health, once denigrated and marginalized, contain holistic understandings of human health and well-being grounded in a deep interconnection and interdependence with nature. How might Africa explore and integrate such endogenous responses into public health policy? What proposals must be put forward to advance truly African approaches to public health and collective well-being?

Moreover, because of its greater plant biodiversity, the equatorial rainforest in Africa holds untapped potentials for new herbal medicine discoveries. What might be required to respect equally and integrate modern sciences and traditional knowledge and practices of care, healing and well-being? How might African countries collaborate and pool resources and efforts to fund such research?

There have already been some success-stories in the fight against the coronavirus pneumonia for instance in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon, where in the latter, at least two plants-based drugs were approved and are commercialized today. Such successes demonstrate that the revalorization of endogenous knowledge and practices in public health and collective well-being also enables African peoples to develop accessible and affordable medicines for national and local healthcare markets, further strengthening and regenerating marginalized communities.

To reflect deeply on these important questions, and to explore Africa's experiences of surviving the COVID-19 pandemic, [Afrospectives](#) and [Global Humanity for Peace Institute](#) come together to co-host an international webinar to be held on the 28 October 2022. This event will bring together African scholars, experts and practitioners who have undertaken research on the geopolitics of health, on African health policies, and on the potential of endogenous medical knowledge and practices.

The contributors to the webinar will address the following questions:

1. How are notions such as health, care and well-being defined and understood in Africa?
2. What lessons could be drawn from the efforts of various African actors in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on African public health, and social and economic life ?
3. What lessons could be learned from African societies' response to endemic diseases such as Bovine tuberculosis, onchocerciasis [River Blindness], Malaria, and so forth?
4. What role might African traditional and endogenous knowledge and practices of medicine play in building sustainable and self-sufficient public health systems in Africa?
5. What challenges must African governments overcome in order to exercise their autonomy and agency in public health policy-making ?
6. What are the new opportunities and possibilities to develop a Pan-African research agenda on vaccine and drugs?

Together, the panelists and the participants will discuss and define relevant orientations and recommendations that could be addressed to African health professionals and decision makers to develop independent health policies capitalizing on their endogenous knowledge and practices.