



**AGA-AFRICA**  
PARTNERSHIPS FOR JUSTICE

AFRICA TRACKER **NEWSLETTER**

May 29 - June 5, 2020

   AGA-Africa  [www.agafrica.org](http://www.agafrica.org)

**Markus Green**  
Board Member, AGA-Africa



## Ramaphosa's big view and Mami Watas

May 22 marked the second month since the first lockdown aimed at stopping the spread of the corona virus was imposed in Africa.

Like elsewhere in the world, it seems the coronavirus fatigue has set in on the continent, with [sentiment swinging](#) in favor of [getting on with it](#) in recent weeks.

Though mindful to warn that the worst is not yet over, and is possibly still to come, South Africa's President [Cyril Ramaphosa](#) and Ghana's President [Nana Akufo-Addo](#) have both said citizens will have to learn to live with COVID-19.

They thus set out what could be the rhetorical framework that will mark the days ahead as restrictions and curfews are eased or lifted. Their actions are not just based on vain hope.

The World Health Organisation [now says](#) early responses in Africa might have slowed down the virus, and it "appears to be taking a different pathway," on the continent.

As last week closed, the coronavirus had reached every African country, infecting more than 100,000 people with 3,100 deaths – lower, compared to other parts of the world.

In comparison, when Europe reported 100,000 cases, death rates were already close to 5,000.

Both the World Health Organization and, particularly, the Addis Ababa-headquartered United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, which in April predicted that between 300,000 and 3.3 million Africans could lose their lives in the pandemic, dialed down their grim scenarios. UNECA's latest policy brief said [those early estimates were "pessimistic"](#).

This week's COVID-19 Tracker will explore the growing structural responses in the AGA-Africa zone, and how recovery plans are shaping up.

To end on a light note, the shortlist for the prestigious [2020 AKO Caine Prize for African Writing](#) has just been announced. It has historically been dominated by AGA-Africa zone writers, though this year's short list is notable for the absence of a Kenyan, South African, Ghanaian, or Ugandan writer, but perennial top candidate Nigeria bagged three of the five spots.

In these COVID-19 wracked days, Chikodili Emelumadu's quirky "[What to do when your child brings home a Mami Wata](#)" is particularly apt. The shortlisted stories are available on the Caine Prize website, and are only a few minutes-read each.

Mami Wata is a mermaid-like [water spirit venerated](#) in West, Central, and Southern Africa, and in the African diaspora in the Americas but, as Emelumadu's tells us at the outset, in the book's context it is used as an umbrella term for both genders (i.e. Mami and Papi Watas). Catch some cheer this week.

## AFRICA COVID-19 STATUS UPDATE



The newsletter tracks developments in Africa's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the setbacks, the triumphs, and pointers to the future as reported in continental and global media as well as how they impact the range of transnational crimes that we work on:

- Read About [AGA-Africa, Partnership For Justice](#)
- For updates on COVID-19 in Africa see: [AfricaCDC](#), [WHO Africa Region](#), [Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Research Center](#).

## CROSS-BORDER/INTERCONTINENTAL COLLABORATION



South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, who is the rotating Chairperson of the African Union, has written a must-read on Africa's battle against the COVID-19 pandemic; where it has faltered, where it has triumphed – and why.

In his [weekly newsletter](#), Ramaphosa argues that the solutions to Africa's problems, be they overcoming disease or eradicating poverty and underdevelopment, reside within Africa itself.

But more notable is his homage to internationalism and continental agency; "African governments have been swift and proactive in implementing measures to flatten the coronavirus curve.

"The African Union developed a comprehensive Joint Continental Strategy to guide cooperation between member states and set up a COVID-19 Response Fund.

"Although there have been severe shortcomings...there have also been stories of excellence and intercontinental collaboration.

"One such example is the work of the African Centers for Disease Control (ACDC) and Prevention, a world-class institution with capabilities for disease surveillance and intelligence, and health emergency preparedness and response.

"In April, the AU and the ACDC launched the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing to strengthen testing capacity in vulnerable countries, with the aim of testing 10 million people over the next six months. Through this partnership, warehousing and distribution hubs are being set up across the continent to distribute medical supplies. The aim is to pool the procurement of diagnostics.

"Although the coronavirus pandemic is not an African problem alone, we have shown ourselves capable of agility and ingenuity."

## MEDICINE AND INNOVATION



Africa's underdeveloped pharmaceutical capacity has been thrown into sharp relief by the COVID-19 pandemic, with [Bangladesh, a poorer country than most African nations, producing 97% of its national demand for medicines, in contrast to Africa where most states are nearly 100% dependent on imports.](#)

The virus crisis has changed the picture, kicking off a series of innovations in testing and treatments. [At least 25 African countries have registered clinical trials for possible COVID-19 treatments.](#)

A team of scientists, doctors, engineers, students and professionals from [Honoris United Universities](#), the first and largest Pan-African network of private higher education institutions, [has developed a prototype for a new non-invasive respirator](#), as well as face shields and splash protection masks, which can be affordably and quickly manufactured via 3D printing.

In Malawi, Blantyre-based tech firm iMoSyS is now using its 3D printers and computer assisted design (CAD) software to [design reusable face masks and face shields](#) for healthcare workers.

Kenya is to [conduct COVID-19 vaccine trials on 400 health workers](#) from Kilifi and Mombasa on the coast, which have been hard hit by the virus.

DRC President Félix Tshisekedi received Jérôme Munyangi, a Congolese doctor and researcher, from exile in France on May 7 and tasked him to lead the country's efforts to find a cure for the coronavirus.

He will now work with the national taskforce to conduct clinical trials with artemisia, which has had efficacy against malaria, but has become controversial since it emerged as the centerpiece of Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina's "COVID Organics" remedy. Though it remains unproven, it has nevertheless [become a hit](#) in parts of Africa.

## TRADE ROUTES AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES



Across East Africa, long-distance truckers have emerged as COVID-19 super-spreaders. They are being [harassed and attacked](#) in some countries, and enduring very long delays, with queues as [long as 40 kilometres](#), at some border crossings as they undergo virus tests.

[Kenya and Tanzania](#), and [Zambia and Tanzania](#), have already had flaps over border closures related to attempts to control the spread of the virus.

Partly, in a bid to reduce interactions along the “Northern Corridor” along which most goods in the Eastern Africa hinterland are transported, Kenya has announced that all cargo docking at port of Mombasa destined for Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan and the DRC, will be [transported via standard gauge railway \(SGR\) for clearance at its Naivasha Inland Container Depot](#) in the Rift Valley starting June 1.

This will considerably reduce costs for the hinterland countries, but will also reorganize the economy in far reaching ways, with potentially significant political consequences. Mombasa and the long-distance trucking industry are [already suffering](#) from the limited movement of goods by SGR to Nairobi. This against a background of a coastal tourist economy that was bloodied by attacks from the Somalia-based Al Shabaab extremist group. It could likely radicalize the Kenyan coast further.

Additionally, Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni and Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame have been talking up the greater use of the Kenyan Lake Victoria port of Kisumu, to transport goods into the East African interior.

After nearly a 30-year hiatus, [fuel exports to Uganda from Kisumu over Lake Victoria resumed](#) at the beginning of the year. Lake Victoria, Africa’s largest lake by area, and the world’s largest tropical lake, is poorly policed by the three countries that share it, and is a haven for [pirates](#), and East African criminal networks stealing boats, and vehicles.

The shift of the cargo business inside Kenya, and the revival of the cheaper and more efficient lake transport, will create a new prosperity sphere, but also new transnational crime challenges.

## ECOLOGY/ENVIRONMENT



South Africa's carbon emissions dropped by a quarter of a million tons each day after March 27, when the national lockdown came into effect. Across the year, this would mean emissions would drop by nearly 100-million tons, or about 20%, if high level lockdown was to continue, according to data collected by the University of East Anglia in the UK and published in [Nature Climate Change](#).

Globally on April 7 alone, daily global carbon emissions dropped 17%. This is the day when the most countries and the greatest number of people were under some sort of a lockdown. This level of pollution is the same as levels back in 2006.

An opinion in South Africa's Mail & Guardian opinion wasn't impressed. Noting that while lockdown measures and a ban on air travel will lead to an 8% drop in global emissions this year, the single biggest drop in carbon emissions in industrial history. What the coronavirus pandemic really tells us is that, beyond individual action, corporations have a big say in reducing global carbon emissions. About [100 global corporations](#), it notes, are still responsible for at least 92% of global pollution.

In related work, researchers estimate that the [protection "service"](#)—cushion from hunger and poverty, and protection from pollution—offered by nature's shield to South Africa [is worth R275 billion](#) (\$16 billion) annually.

## PERILS FORGOTTEN BY THE HEADLINES



Sometimes lost to the pandemic headlines, are the several vulnerable groups in Africa, which are threatened by the virus in other ways.

The World Food Program (WFP) has warned that the pandemic is likely to worsen West Africa's looming mass hunger, and [more than 21 million people across the region will be short of food](#) during the coming lean season between June and August.

East Africa's long rains and planting season meanwhile coincided with the [spread of locust](#) swarms. Due to the rains, the region is producing an abundance of vegetation, which allows these locust populations to mature and explode into the billions. An average swarm of 40 million locusts can travel up to 90 miles and eat enough food to feed 35,000 people in a single day.

The April-May rains are also responsible for hundreds of deaths due to flooding across in the region. In [Kenya](#), up to 200 people died due to flooding in April alone—compared to the 52 deaths (as of May 25) the country has registered due the coronavirus since March.

[Rwanda](#) and Uganda have also witnessed hundreds of deaths and destruction of critical infrastructure like roads due to the heavy seasonal rains. Including Somalia, and Ethiopia, nearly two million people have been displaced by floods in the wider East African region.



In recent days, we have seen more early stages of post-lockdown recovery plans to deal with the pandemic emerge.

Kenya's President Uhuru [Kenyatta on the weekend announced](#) plans to help businesses and Kenyans survive the economic storm caused by the coronavirus pandemic worth US\$500 million.

Dubbed the "8-point economic stimulus plan," Kenya's intervention follows a number of countries around Africa.

[South Africa](#) in late April announced a \$26 billion stimulus targeting large increases in existing welfare grants, funds for protecting jobs and a R200bn (\$11 billion) loan guarantee scheme for pandemic-hit businesses. Nigeria too has passed an economic stimulus bill to "prevent large scale job losses in an already fragile economy and allow people to carry on with their lives as best as possible in the event of a large scale outbreak". [Ghana](#), committed \$104 million to its "COVID-19 Alleviation Program (CAP) Business Support Scheme". It will support more than 200,000 micro, small and medium enterprises.

On May 13, Mauritius, as we reported, became the first African [country to declare itself coronavirus-free](#). Much as the worst might be behind it, the economic hit it suffered was huge and immediate. Initial estimates suggest that gross domestic product will contract by 3% to 6% in 2020.

However, Mauritius is an established welfare state, which will help cushion the blow to the country's poorest, as will a \$300-million emergency relief package for businesses and workers.

Copyright © 2020 AGA-Africa, All rights reserved.

[www.agafrica.org](http://www.agafrica.org)

Want to change how you receive these emails?  
You can update your preferences or unsubscribe from this list.

