

COVID-19: Why is the World Dumbfounded by Africa's Success?

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in February, billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates [warned](#) that 10 million Africans could die from the virus. Researchers at Imperial College London were a bit more modest, putting the estimated number of African deaths at 3 million.

However, as the months rolled on and the expected mass deaths were not happening as prophesied, someone had to find an explanation. Maybe Africa's youth population is the reason, some said. Perhaps it is the warm weather? Maybe Africa's underdeveloped infrastructure means the spread of the diseases isn't as fast. In late May, The BBC [said](#) that it was because deaths weren't being properly recorded. Not so, John Nkengasong, Director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told the Financial Times. "African countries took very radical steps very early on by shutting frontiers and doing lockdowns."

As Africans continued to 'stubbornly' refuse to die en masse, the headlines became creepy. "Why has Africa been spared from Coronavirus?" blared a [headline](#) on the website of German national broadcaster DW.

The 'grim' reality that African governments might simply have done the right things to contain the pandemic was anathema to these people.

Little attention was paid to what African governments were doing in preparing for and dealing with the disease.

It did not occur to the doomsayers:

- That the Rwandan government was working with its young biochemists to conduct aggressive contact tracing, isolation and treatment, and [using robotics](#) to contain the pandemic;
- That Uganda, by instituting the continent's strictest lockdown when it shut down its borders and its economy before a single case was detected, created a window which helped its medical professionals to better understand the patterns of the virus (so far deaths in Uganda are at zero);
- That South Africa, Africa's largest economy, took very painful measures that gave the country time to manage later increases in the cases;
- That Sub-Saharan African countries, with their experience in handling deadly epidemics before like Ebola and Marburg, were far more prepared diagnostically and epidemiologically to deal with COVID-19.

So, why was (and indeed still is) the Western world so obsessed with these doomsday scenarios of Africa's COVID-19 decimation?

I hate to say it but, unfortunately, a lot of this had/has to do with a long history of racism and colonialism, of dismissing Africa as a 'dark continent' incapable of self-governance.

These doomsday prognoses of Africa's COVID-19 annihilation are in the same tradition as governance predictions by the likes of the Human Rights Watch and the 'International Crisis Group' and many Western thinktanks and media whose arrogance is so perverse that they've created 'fragile states' and 'crisis' indices where they have to rank African countries' vulnerability to civil wars, diseases and economic malaise.

I have [written](#) before that when a country bucks these Western predications, these institutions normally find a way of smearing their reputations. A good example is Rwanda where a

coordinated onslaught of western academics and journalists have always attempted to dismiss its social and economic transformation citing human rights and 'good governance issues.'

These western institutions simply can't contend with the fact that maybe, just maybe, African countries might do better at something than Western nations. This ridiculous thinking needs to stop.

It may well be that the worst is yet to come concerning the COVID-19 trajectory in Africa. There's a lot that is still unknown about this virus. But at least for now, I will salute the efforts most African countries have put in to contain the pandemic.

I will celebrate the breakthrough recorded by a team of genomic researchers in Nigeria who have [developed](#) a fast-track, cheap Covid-19 testing kit that has already been certified by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA);

I will give my salute to inadequately equipped yet determined contact tracers in Lagos's slums, in Nairobi's crowded suburbs, at airports and small clinics from Uganda's rural towns to Ghana's coast; the work done by Africa's medical doctors, nurses and clinical officers some of whom have paid [with their very lives](#)

Dismissing the progress the continent has made is to deny their sacrifices.