

RESEARCHERS BOOTCAMP

THEME 4: COVID LOCKDOWNS: CAN THEY HELP TO GOVERN THE PANDEMIC IN AFRICA?

PURPOSE: The study uses two frameworks to analyse the responses of a limited number of African and non-African countries, focusing on a few themes and lessons that may assist African governments. It develops a Government Counter COVID Intervention Framework and refers to the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker.

EDUCATION RESEARCHERS RESPOND TO LOCKDOWN



DATE

16 April - 30 April



NUMBER OF RESEARCHERS

14



APPROACH

Case studies through desk top research; comparative analysis.



CASE STUDIES

China
Italy
India
Nigeria
South Africa
South Korea
United States

FINDINGS

Reopening schools after lockdown is contentious in almost every case study. There is uncertainty regarding children becoming infected and transmitting infection, leading to policy makers coming under enormous pressure from teachers, parents and children themselves.

Governments are learning that lockdowns are technically and scientifically complex and highly expensive and offer only temporary breathing space. Lockdowns seem to present opportunities for a sitting government to secure control.

Lockdown and testing & tracing are used in combination: all countries in lockdown do use testing & tracing; countries primarily using testing & tracing also implement lockdown measures. Lockdown remains the default option.

Testing & tracing is one of the most important government functions and serves as an accountability mechanism. Yet it is difficult to master in complex human social systems. Information is difficult to interpret, limiting the value of the approach for strategic decision making by governments.

The impact of lockdown is weakened by poor living conditions such as overcrowding, high population densities and lack of access to clean water. There are also cultural practices and traditions that come into play.

Lockdown is a government designed and driven strategy intended to limit the speed and spread of COVID-19. There is limited analysis of what interventions are included in and how well lockdowns work. This presented the opportunity to examine strategies, policy tools and functions a government may activate to combat COVID-19.

It is difficult to establish how much school closures contribute to suppressing virus spread. A rapid systematic review of recent research has brought into question the effectiveness of school closures in limiting infections.

Economic estimates are that school closures impact negatively on national productivity. Caregivers are obliged to stay at home to care for children, and employers are unable to operate their businesses without their workforce.

School closures are disruptive in multiple dimensions: school feeding programmes are interrupted, straining household food self-sufficiency; in fragile states, children can face higher risks of child exploitation; in middle- and low-income countries, gains in expanded access could recede; learning losses may be irrecoverable.

The majority of governments in Africa have adopted a lockdown approach which is associated with variable levels of enforcement.

Large-scale testing depends on technical capacity and a high trust relationship between citizens and government. Figures indicate it is not commonly practiced by African countries.

African countries are highly vulnerable to aftereffects of economic disruption in trade partner countries in Europe and Asia, and are now simultaneously experiencing the full impact of the virus locally.

Under lockdown conditions – and thereafter – high proportions of acutely food-insecure people will be in need of assistance in the Horn of Africa, Southern Africa and parts of West Africa.

Challenges for African governments responding to or counteracting COVID-19

Losses of informal jobs on the African continent are likely to affect higher proportions of women and youth. Future job losses could lead to 'reverse migration' of unemployed urban dwellers to rural areas and the further spread of COVID-19.

More information is needed to reflect the specificity of African social and economic conditions, e.g. limited reference is made to rurality and how COVID-19 behaves in rural human settlement conditions. This is a major gap since in 2018, 60% of Africa's population was living in rural areas.

It is especially important to understand the texture of community life and intermingling with COVID-19. This calls for greater involvement of communities in how COVID-19 is to be countered.