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An active and coordinated response is necessary to fight COVID-19

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our habits. Faced with an unprecedented global health crisis, it was imperative that we adapt quickly while at the same time putting the necessary means in place to deal with this crisis.

As a major regional actor in West Africa and the Sahel, our office, UNOWAS, took the necessary measures from the very beginning of the crisis through an effective and coordinated response.

First, at the internal level, through its Crisis Management Team, UNOWAS took swift action to protect its staff, while putting in place administrative and logistical arrangements to ensure continuity in the implementation of its mandate.

The measures taken by UNOWAS, which are reviewed regularly, are part of a coordinated UN system-wide response with the Senegalese authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN entity in charge of managing the COVID-19 crisis.

While protecting our staff, we, like the other United Nations agencies, not only continued our commitment, but also supported the efforts of the countries of the sub-region in their fight against the spread of the pandemic.

In the face of a pandemic that knows no borders, no religion, and no ethnicity, it was necessary - and still is - to act in unity and solidarity to defeat the COVID-19 and start the post-pandemic stage.

This is the sense of the UNOWAS approach under the leadership of the Special Representative, Mohamed Ibn Chambas.

Several activities and commitments have been undertaken - and others are ongoing - with the countries of the sub-region and various regional and international partners to support and strengthen solidarity-based responses that integrate the protection of vulnerable populations and take into account respect for human rights.

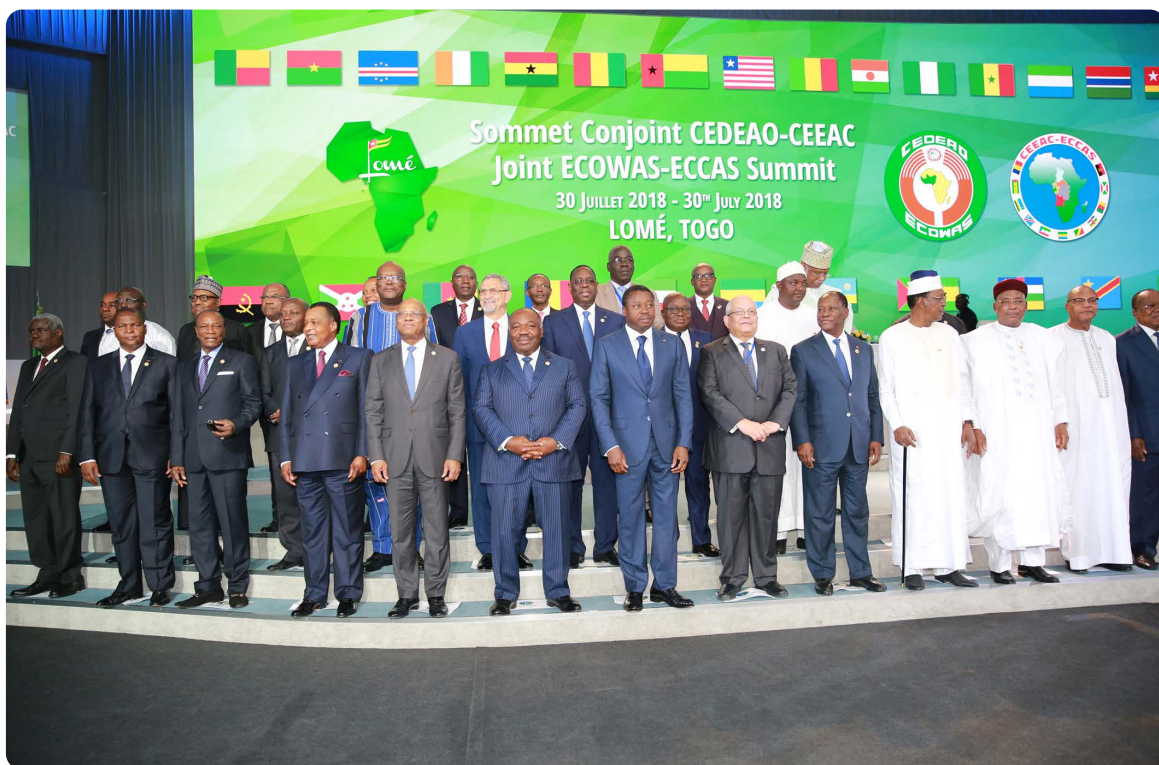
At a time when many countries in the world and in our sub-region are beginning to lift the restrictive measures imposed since the beginning of the crisis, it is very important that we maintain our vigilance and continue, with patience and solidarity, to respect the health protection measures to put an end to this pandemic.

This editorial is being written as I arrive at the end of my career with the United Nations and I leave the United Nations with a strong conviction that multilateralism is necessary to respond to the critical challenges the world faces.

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“Together, we will defeat COVID-19”



▲
Sommet Conjoint des Chefs d’Etat et de Gouvernement de la Communauté Economique des Etats de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (CEDEAO) et de la Communauté Economique des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale (CEEAC). 30 juillet 2018. Lomé

Since the outbreak and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, our way of life and operating system have suddenly changed.

The whole world is trying to adapt to face the spread of this virus that threatens the entire humanity.

In a reaction that is now globalized, unprecedented and often drastic measures are being taken by all countries to protect the populations and eradicate this pandemic that knows no borders.



We are going through a difficult and complex ordeal that requires from all of us an unprecedented mobilization of our resources and efforts, but also- and above all- of our solidarity.

More than ever, the interest and the protection of the human being must be at the center of our primary concerns.

More than ever, our relations at the local, national, regional and international levels must be cemented by the strength of our solidarity and the ardor of our optimism.

Because our region, West Africa and the Sahel, is not spared.

Populations are also affected by the spread of the virus, which adds to the list of challenges already facing our region.

The authorities and governments in place have taken the necessary steps to protect populations and to develop an effective response to the crisis.

I commend the courage and dedication of all medical staff and the various services and institutions that work tirelessly in the countries of the region to protect the populations and provide the necessary assistance, while ensuring compliance with the measures and recommendations dictated by the national authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The discipline and the respect of the measures by the populations in the countries of the region, demonstrate the civic-mindedness and sense of solidarity that must be safeguarded.

It also underlines the determination of everyone to act in the interest of all.

I call on all citizens in West Africa and the Sahel to maintain this determination and continue to respect all the measures imposed by the national authorities to fight the spread of COVID-19.

I encourage authorities and governments in the region to redouble their efforts to ensure inclusive protection and assistance.

But it is crucial that the mobilization and efforts of the countries of the region be supported in a rapid and coordinated manner by the international community, which, in these difficult times, must fully play its role as an active promoter of a universal solidarity.



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The United Nations has taken strong actions.

A call for the cancellation or postponement of the debt of African countries, has been launched by the United Nations to support developing countries.

On 25 March, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, launched a \$2 billion global humanitarian response to support the world's poorest countries fight against COVID-19.

He also called for an immediate ceasefire in all corners of the globe to reinforce diplomatic action, help create conditions for the delivery of lifesaving aid, and bring hope to places that are among the most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These are, among other daily actions, concrete responses to accompany the efforts of the countries affected by the pandemic- and an essential initiative to rebuild universal solidarity, which is now urgent.

United Nations personnel is mobilized on all fronts.

Resident Coordinators and the agencies and programmes of the United Nations, including WHO, based in the sub-region, are already working in coordination with national authorities and regional partners to support their responses against COVID-19.

The United Nations system and all its staff working in West Africa and the Sahel are part of the diverse communities and populations that make up this region.

Today, they are even more so. They are alongside the authorities and the populations in their fight against the spread of COVID-19, with dedication and solidarity.

Together- we will defeat COVID-19.

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In the face of COVID-19, UNOWAS remains in solidarity with West Africa and the Sahel countries

As soon as the COVID-19 pandemic erupted in the sub-region, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, UNOWAS, was quickly mobilized to continue its work-and above all-to support the various governments in their fight against the spread of the Coronavirus.



People wearing protective masks are walking in Conakry, Guinea, on April 29, 2020. © HRW-2020 Cellou Binani

Faced with an unprecedented health crisis that disrupted the lives of millions of people and required the implementation of binding measures to deal with the spread of COVID-19, UNOWAS, like all major actors in West Africa and the Sahel, had to quickly adapt to a crisis which is now global!

As a Special Regional Political Mission covering a geographical area as large as it is complex, it was vital for UNOWAS to act on three priorities: the first was the urgent need to ensure the protection of UNOWAS staff, the second was the need to support countries and partners in the sub-region, and the third priority was to ensure the continued implementation of UNOWAS's mandate.



Following the directives dictated by the United Nations headquarters, the United Nations system based in Dakar, as well as the measures taken by the Government of Senegal, UNOWAS, from the very beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, took the necessary actions to ensure the protection of all its staff.

Like many actors based in Senegal, the announcement on 23 March by President Macky Sall of a state of health emergency with a curfew and a series of precautionary, often restrictive, measures to deal with COVID-19, propelled UNOWAS into a new form of work, now unavoidable: The telecommuting.



UNOWAS has remained fully engaged with countries in the sub-region and its partners to provide the necessary support in this time of crisis

Fully engaged

«Stay at home» has become a global watchword for saving lives and stemming the dizzying spread of Coronavirus. But despite the closure of borders and the implementation of 'barrier measures', UNOWAS has remained fully engaged with countries in the sub-region and its partners to provide the necessary support in this time of crisis.

One way to do this was to use 'the virtual' to continue to act on the real. Against a backdrop of laughter, children's cries and unusual noises, UNOWAS staff learned to master Zooms, Teams and other digital communication tools that allow UNOWAS, like other regional and international partners, to stay connected and maintain working relationships with all its partners and stakeholders.

From the very beginning of the crisis, UNOWAS, through the Special Representative of the Secretary general for West Africa and the Sahel (SRSG), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, has maintained and increased exchanges with countries and partners in the sub-region, including those of the United Nations system and civil society organizations, in order to renew its commitment and solidarity in these difficult times, and to demonstrate its determination to pursue its mission of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In order to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the countries of the sub-region and to undertake concrete actions in support of the measures already put in place by various governments, UNOWAS has multiplied meetings and consultations with the Resident Coordinators of the United Nations and within the United Nations Group for Sustainable Development for the West and Central African region, as well as with civil society partners and regional actors to support efforts against the spread of the virus, while continuing to address the still persistent challenges





UNOWAS alongside the inhabitants of the town of N'gor to defeat COVID19, offers more than 3,000 masks. Photo: UNOWAS

related, inter alia, to the organization of peaceful elections, the respect of human rights, and the role of women and youth in the consolidation of Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel..



Regional approach

ECOWAS and UNOWAS stressed the importance of the strength of regional unity against the pandemic, and recalled the need to respect human rights

In addition, UNOWAS continues to build an ever-closer regional partnership with ECOWAS, a traditional partner. Illustrated in a joint Op-ed in which the two heads of ECOWAS and UNOWAS, Jean Claude Kassi Brou and Mohamed Ibn Chambas, stressed the importance of the strength of regional unity against the pandemic, and recalled the need to respect human rights. This partnership also manifested itself in a recent message from the Special Representative on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the founding of ECOWAS, whose celebration under the theme: «45 years of solidarity in the service of the peoples of West Africa», fully echoed the message continuously carried by UNOWAS in this crisis that we are experiencing.

Redoubling efforts to strengthen solidarity and coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has increased poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, lack or absence of access to water, health and education services, The SRSG also undertook meetings at the international level during which he discussed with the Special Envoys and Representatives for the Sahel of the European Union and various countries, the socio-economic impact of the pandemic and the means to be implemented to support the efforts of the countries of the sub-region.



Other important meetings with officials from various governments and political actors contributed to strengthening UNOWAS and United Nations solidarity with the authorities and peoples of the sub region. Indeed, this unprecedented situation has not prevented UNOWAS from continuing its work and intensifying its efforts to assure its partners of the continuity of its commitments.

Beyond its role as mandated by the UN Security Council, UNOWAS, in coordination with national, regional and international actors, continues to promote messages of solidarity, regional unity and responsibility. It's only by acting together that we can defeat COVID-19.

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UNOWAS working with ECOWAS to curb the COVID-19 pandemic effects in West Africa



Since the beginning of the Covid-19, the two regional partners, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), have been advocating for a regional and international solidarity to fight the pandemic and its consequences in the sub-region.

On 24 April 2020, a “virtual” extraordinary session of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government was organized via videoconference, with the participation of 15 Heads of State of the sub-region, to discuss and develop a rapid and effective response to the spread of the pandemic and its harmful impacts, particularly on the regional economy.

Indeed, the rapid spread of the pandemic with enormous numbers of deaths continues to strain not only the health systems of all countries, but also the global economy, including most developed countries. West Africa and the Sahel, already fragilized by several challenges that hinder its development and threaten its stability, must now face this unprecedented crisis whose health and socio-economic impacts require an equally unprecedented mobilization.

**The full Statement of
the SRSG Mohamed Ibn
Chambas**



As of 24 June 2020, the number of confirmed cases has risen to 70,508, with more than 1,300 deaths, out of 332,820 cases and 8,733 deaths in the African continent, West Africa is the most affected sub-region in Africa.

Concerns and actions

While expressing their determination to coordinate their response to better combat the spread of COVID-19, the 15 Heads of State voiced concerns about the negative social, economic, financial and human impact of the pandemic on all ECOWAS member states, as well as on the regional integration process, and the regional peace and security agenda. The same concerns are also shared by the United Nations, through the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary general for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, who recalled during the special session that «the pandemic is further increasing pressure on health and governance systems with serious consequences on the economy, peace and security in the sub-region.»

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the pandemic is expected to wipe out more than 300 million jobs in the global labor force, making it urgent for ECOWAS heads of state to take national and regional measures to protect people in the sub-region from the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19.

ECOWAS predicts that the economic growth rate, initially projected at 3.3%, would fall to 2% if the pandemic was to end in June 2020. It would fall to -2.1% if the region does not take adequate measures to slow down the spread of the virus and if the pandemic continues beyond the second half of 2020 as projected by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In response, ECOWAS member states have taken a series of measures to address the health crisis and curb the economic impact of the pandemic. They pledged, inter alia, to contribute to the African Union Solidarity Fund and allocate at least 15% of their annual budget to strengthen their health care systems. The ECOWAS summit also recommended to support the African Union's initiative to negotiate with partners for the cancellation of public debt and a restructuring of the private debt of African countries. It was also decided to appeal to the international community to mobilize additional resources for the region to address the economic and so-



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cial challenges countries are facing. For a better regional coordination in the response, ECOWAS Heads of State and Governments have set up ministerial committees to coordinate regional pandemic efforts under the supervision of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The summit also encouraged states to provide substantial support to the social sectors (distance learning tools, strengthening of health systems and facilities, easy Internet access) and for the most disadvantaged segments of society (social safety nets) as well as to set up a support programme for the pharmaceutical and health protection equipment manufacturing sector, whose output covers barely 20% of the region's current consumption needs.

Solidarity and mobilization

"In the face of a pandemic that knows no borders, solidarity and mobilization at the national, regional and international level is crucial. No country can cope with this crisis alone." This is indeed the message that the Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel has stressed at this summit. He recalled the determination of the United Nations, at this time of major crisis, to promote international solidarity and union to defeat the Covid-19 through various initiatives, including the launch of a \$2 billion global humanitarian response plan to help the world's poorest countries fight COVID-19 and called for an immediate ceasefire in conflict zones to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable. The United Nations is also working closely with governments, including in West Africa and the Sahel, to establish regional humanitarian hubs. In Africa, these



hubs should be established in Accra, Addis, Cairo and Johannesburg and would be used to facilitate assistance to the most vulnerable populations.

The special Representative also stressed the potential impact of this pandemic on peace and security in the sub-region, on the already dire humanitarian situation in particular in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, as well as on political processes, stressing that this crisis could affect the ability of States to respond to threats to national and regional peace and security.

Recalling the importance of partnership with ECOWAS , UNOWAS Chief, Ibn Chambas, called for a greater inclusiveness in implementing measures taken against the spread of the disease. «Even if they are necessary in these circumstances, the measures that have been put in place have an impact on the most vulnerable populations, especially women and young people, so we must take all necessary measures to put them at the heart of our decision-making,» he said.



Related documents

- [Communiqué Final :Session Extraordinaire de la Conférence Des Chefs d’Etat Et De Gouvernement de la CEDEAO \(Par Visioconférence, le 23 avril 2020\)](#)
- [Discours du Président Jean Claude Brou – Sommet Extraordinaire – CEDEAO COVID-19](#)
- [Sommet extraordinaire de la CEDEAO sur le COVID19 : discours du Président en exercice de la CEDEAO, Issoufou Mahamadou](#)

“At WHO, we are working around-the-clock to support governments in leading the response to the COVID-19 pandemic”



Reaching communities in Chad with COVID-19 safety messages.
Photo: Who Africa

Can you tell us how the COVID-19 pandemic is progressing in Western Africa?

The COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to increase in West Africa. Of the 47 countries in the WHO African Region (which is mainly sub-Saharan Africa and Algeria), West Africa accounts for over 37% of all reported cases (around 34,000 cases across 16 countries). The majority of these are in a few countries. Currently, Nigeria has almost 9000 cases, Ghana has around 7000, and Guinea and Senegal are at around 3000 reported cases each.





This is a whole-of-society effort, everyone has a role to play, and with solidarity, science and equity we can save lives and serve the most vulnerable.

The majority of countries still have fewer than 1000 reported cases, and in half the countries, compared to where they were two weeks ago, the cases have increased by less than 50%. So, these are encouraging signs. Over the same period though, in a few countries, cases have more than doubled. So, we are monitoring this situation closely and continuing to work with partners, in support of governments, to contain the spread of this virus. We are also monitoring very closely, the situation in humanitarian settings in West Africa, as these are some of the most vulnerable communities in the world.

What lessons have been learnt from combatting previous outbreaks such as Ebola in West Africa?

In Ebola and other widespread and severe outbreaks (such as cholera, lassa fever, yellow fever, and measles) baseline capacities have been built in surveillance, laboratories, and other public health interventions.

We have learned that multisectoral approaches, engaging all-of-government and all-of-society, are essential. This has a long history, starting with our work on HIV/AIDS – how to divide up tasks based on each agency's comparative advantages. For COVID-19, within the UN, we are doing this, leveraging the expertise of agencies working on socio-economic considerations, and others focusing on specific population groups.

In the past, coordination in outbreak response was sometimes ad hoc, but we now have state coordination platforms,



such as Presidential or ministerial taskforces and incident management systems, with standard operating procedures. Institutional capacities have been built in countries and national public health institutes, academia, grassroots organizations and other groups, including the private sector, have been mobilized to support the response.

As you may know, the Ebola epidemic in West Africa led to a reform WHO's work in emergencies to make the organization faster, more operational and better coordinated. This included developing monitoring and evaluation tools to strengthen implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) (which is the international legal treaty on public health emergencies).

So, capacities have been built in an evidence-based way, using these tools. For instance, 46 of 47 countries in the WHO African Region have undergone an independent review of their emergency preparedness, known as joint external evaluation, and 30 have subsequently developed plans to address the biggest gaps. Mobilizing funding to implement these plans has been a challenge, but I hope the COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting that preparedness is a good investment.

Countries are starting to lift their lockdowns are you concerned by what may happen?

Governments have had to make very difficult decisions in recent months: whether to move quickly in implementing social measures with limited information, or whether to wait for capacities to be scaled-up, with the risk that cases may spread. Particularly in Africa, where people rely on daily earnings to put food on the table for their families, governments are having to balance between saving lives and protecting livelihoods.

Countries have used the time during lockdowns to scale-up public health capacities and inform and educate communities on the preventive measures we should all be taking. They are also easing restrictions in line with WHO recommendations, to take a step-by-step, data-driven approach.

In West Africa overall, the doubling time of the epidemic has slowed from 4.1 days at 1 April, to 7.8 days at 10 May to 9.6 days at 24 May. Countries should continue monitoring the progression of the epidemic closely, at the district and provincial levels, so that social measures can be adjusted to contain any surge of cases in hotspot areas.



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How is WHO supporting countries to combat COVID-19 in Western Africa?

At WHO, we are working around-the-clock to support governments in leading the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have teams in every country, and in West Africa we have repurposed over 300 staff members, including from our emergency hub in Dakar and our inter-country support team in Libreville. We have also deployed international experts to support the response.

With WFP and other partners, we have provided and replenished essential supplies, such as laboratory test kits and personal protective equipment for health workers, as well as medical equipment.

Looking back to early February, in West Africa, only Senegal could diagnose COVID-19, now all countries can do so. Using interactive virtual sessions, we have trained more than 5000 front-line health workers in key areas of intervention, such as infection prevention and control and case management, and we are partnering with the West Africa College of Nurses and national professional associations to cascade these skills.

In addition, every Tuesday, I meet virtually with the Regional Directors of our sister UN agencies in West and Central Africa, to coordinate and take forward action to address the health consequences and mitigate the social and economic impacts of this pandemic. As I mentioned previously, this is a whole-of-society effort, everyone has a role to play, and with solidarity, science and equity we can save lives and serve the most vulnerable.

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Interview conducted in mid-May 2020

We must silence the guns to defeat COVID-19

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the United Nations has called for an immediate and responsible global ceasefire so that people in conflict zones are also protected from the virus.

The “Non-Violence” (or “Knotted Gun”) sculpture by Swedish artist Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd on display at the UNHQ. NY. ►



« The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war. That is why today, I am calling for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world »

“The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war. That is why today, I am calling for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world.» That is how the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, called for a global ceasefire on 23 March 2020, only a few days after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) a pandemic.

The Secretary-General’s call quickly saw the endorsement of several states, regional and non-governmental organizations, civil society actors, religious leaders and armed groups, as well as regional and international public opinions, who relayed the messages in favor of the implementation of the global ceasefire.





MINUSMA peacekeepers on patrol inside Mali. Photo: MINUSMA



In West Africa and the Sahel, several states are facing two «wars», one against the COVID-19 whose cases of contamination are increasing day by day and the one against terrorism

The silence of weapons during this pandemic period should allow to focus first on the fight against the virus and to provide rapid humanitarian and health assistance to populations in conflict zones. In his report to the UN Security Council published on 21 May 2020, the UN Secretary-General said that the pandemic has already had a serious impact on efforts to protect civilians, particularly in countries affected by a conflict where health systems are already weakened.

Two «wars»

In West Africa and the Sahel, several states are facing two «wars», one against the COVID-19 whose cases of contamination are increasing day by day and the one against terrorism which continue to perpetrate daily attacks. Indeed, the violence against civilians and defence forces has intensified in the Sahel region, especially in Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Chad at a time when governments and populations are fighting to save and protect the lives of hundreds of millions of people and to counter the effects of COVID-19 on the economy. “It is feared that terrorists may exploit any gaps as focus drifts to addressing the pandemic to carry out opportunistic attacks in the Lake Chad Basin area,” warns the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas. As a reminder, on 23 March, close to a hundred Chadian soldiers and about 77 Nigerian soldiers were killed in separate attacks by violent extremists in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) area.



On 11 May, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), sounds the alarm about the growing number of displaced people since April and the worrying security situation in northern Nigeria. UNHCR estimates that more than 23,000 people have fled the violence in Nigeria to Niger. This security situation, which pushes people to move to safer areas, could undermine the efforts of states in the fight against the spread of the virus.

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So far 16 armed groups in the sub-region, including the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) in Senegal, have responded favourably to Mr. Guterres' call. But despite the many commitments to the appeal, the implementation of the ceasefire is still difficult. « Distrust is deep, with many spoilers and many suspicions,» the Secretary-General said in his second call for a cessation of hostilities. « We need to do everything possible to find the peace and unity our world so desperately needs to battle COVID-19,» he added.

COVID-19 pandemic cannot be defeated without effective respect of Human rights



“It is an economic crisis. A social crisis and a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis”. These words of the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sum up the need concerted action in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and instituting measures to address it on the respect of human rights.

Like the rest of the world, countries in West Africa and the Sahel, have instituted multiple actions in response to the pandemic including through, the closure of their land, air and maritime borders, lockdowns and other sanitary cordons, imposition of states of emergency and curfews, the mandatory wearing of face masks in public places and other sanitary measures.

Some of these measures, even though permissible under international human rights law within the context of the global health emergency, are soliciting diverse debates on the extent to which their application aligns with human rights standards.



The lockdowns and other restrictions have limitations on the freedoms of movement and assembly and the ability of many people to work and earn a living which ultimately impact on the enjoyment of their economic and social rights. The long term economic impact of the pandemic due to the decline in revenue streams, increased fiscal deficits, rising inflation especially of basic commodities and rising unemployment, may severely impact on the realisation of rights including, health, education, food, safe and clean drinking water and the right to development.

Focus on human development

To mitigate the effects of these measures on the human rights and on the well-being of their populations. West Africa and Sahel countries have taken additional proactive measures such as economic and social protection programs. While reactions to these programs vary from one country to another, it is important to highlight that if they are rigorously implemented, they could constitute an effective social safety net in the immediate and medium terms while states of the sub-region continue to cope with the pandemic.

But just like the Ebola epidemic, this pandemic has exposed the chronic lack of investment in the healthcare systems and profound inadequacies in the governance systems which over time, have not allowed to create the enabling environment for the respect of human rights such as the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Because of the low levels of investment, many healthcare systems in the sub region are not able to provide basic healthcare to the population. The situation may be compounded by the pandemic.

The pandemic has also revealed the gaps in policy making and the need for re-prioritization and focus on human development. The pandemic has shown that human security, which includes proper healthcare is inextricably tied to state security and therefore must be taken extremely seriously by policy makers.

Without doubt, countries in the sub-region will seize this opportunity to redouble their efforts to develop human rights oriented policies and programs to ensure the provision of healthcare in line with their obligations under international human rights law.



West Africa
and Sahel
countries have
taken additional
proactive
measures such
as economic and
social protection
programs





Despite the COVID-19 threat, more than 7 million Malian voters were called on on March 29, 2020 to choose their 147 members of the Malian National Assembly during the first round of legislative elections across the country Photo: MINUSMA

Impact on Human rights

The response to the pandemic is also raising questions.

Some of the restrictions have reduced the civic space and the possibility for debates to promote public accountability of the response and on wider governance issues. Some human rights actors have raised serious concerns regarding restrictions imposed on them to monitor the human rights issues relating to the response.

Meanwhile, reports of the use of excessive force by security forces while ensuring compliance with lockdown measures and other restrictions have increased scrutiny on their role in the overall response to the pandemic and its impact on human rights.

In some countries, security forces deployed to ensure compliance have been involved in human rights violations including the right to life, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, arbitrary arrest and detention thus questioning the necessity and proportionality of their actions.

The Nigerian Human Rights Commission has reported that between 31 March-4 May at least 29 persons were killed, a majority by security forces enforcing the lockdowns.

Human rights actors in Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Senegal and Togo have raised concerns over the use of excessive force by security forces.



Some of the restrictions have reduced the civic space and the possibility for debates to promote public accountability of the response and on wider governance issues





Given the increasing perception of the instrumentalization of the justice system in the region, human rights actors continue to closely watch the use of additional powers assigned to the Executive to deal with the pandemic

In response, authorities in some cases promised to initiate investigations and address these concerns. In Togo for instance, the Commander of the special COVID-19 force was removed and investigations initiated.

In addition, as part of measures to curb the spread of the pandemic in penitentiary facilities, about six thousand prisoners have been released or are being released in Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. It is urgent for all countries in the sub region to seize this opportunity to decongest the prisons and undertake deep penitentiary reforms.

Given the increasing perception of the instrumentalization of the justice system in the region, human rights actors continue to closely watch the use of additional powers assigned to the Executive to deal with the pandemic in order to ensure that they are used exclusively as part of the response to the pandemic and not for personal or partisan political gains.

2020 is also a year of important elections. In countries such as Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Niger preparing for presidential elections, it is vital that everything is done in an inclusive and consensual manner to ensure that the elections are held in accordance with the law and the right of voters, the only guarantors of a peaceful election.

UN support

In addition to the technical and financial support to Governments in the sub-region provided by the UN country teams towards the development and implementation of national emergency plans, the UN continues to support the authorities to also mainstream human rights in their response.

The Secretary-General is advocating to put human rights at the centre of the response. On 23 April, he launched a report on COVID-19 and human rights which provides guidance on ensuring a human rights approach to the response.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet in addition to the support provided by her Office to national authorities including in the West Africa and Sahel region, has written to National Human Rights Institutions to recognize their key role and urge for more involvement in the design and implementation of response plans.

In West Africa and the Sahel region, the Special Representative of the Secretary general, Mohamed Ibn Chambas has been vocal on the need to ensure the respect of human rights while fighting the pandemic. Jointly with the President of the



Economic Commission of West African States Commission, Jean Claude Brou, they have also underlined the centrality of human rights in the response to COVID-19.

Defeating COVID-19 is a collective responsibility. It will require a unity of purpose that transcends beyond concepts, political party lines, political and governance systems, traditional and cultural beliefs. It will also require a Human Rights Based Approach that would enhance the meaningful participation of communities, women, vulnerable and marginalized groups in finding the solutions while at the same time preventing and addressing instances of stigmatization and victimization which may weaken ongoing efforts.

In this uncharted crisis, it is imperative to reinforce constructive engagement between the state and its citizens in pursuit of solutions.

It is crucial for leaders to continue to demonstrate leadership at all levels in order to sustain local, national and regional responsibility and ownership, for a successful implementation of the measures already taken and those to come.

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Human Rights must not be forgotten

Joint Op-Ed by Jean-Claude Kassi Brou and Mohamed Ibn Chambas



Awareness campaign to curb the spread of the new coronavirus, in Dakar, Senegal, April 18, 2020. © Sylvain Cherkouki / AP / SIPA

For ECOWAS and UNOWAS, the regional union makes strength against the pandemic in West Africa and the Sahel. But be careful not to forget fundamental human rights, stress Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, president of the ECOWAS Commission, and Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-general for West Africa and the Sahel.

The tribune is co-signed by Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, president of the ECOWAS Commission, and Mohamed Ibn Chambas, special representative of the UN secretary general for West Africa and the Sahel.

► In the face of the unprecedented health crisis that is destabilizing the global economy and disrupting the lives of billions of people around the world, the mobilization and solidarity of all is a human necessity and a strategic priority. The efforts made by individual countries, important as they are, will not be enough in the face of a virus that knows no borders, nationality, religion or ethnicity.

The countries of West Africa and the Sahel are not spared by this threat. According to the WHO data, out of 69,126 confirmed cases in the continent, 20,611 are confirmed cases in West Africa alone (Data to be updated prior to publication). This health crisis comes on top of the many challenges, particularly of a security nature, that already affect the development, peace and stability of that region. To face this unprecedented ordeal, governments- supported by all public and private actors- have swiftly taken a series of necessary measures to protect populations and curb the socio-economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.





The various
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and beyond

Responsible multilateralism

The various initiatives undertaken by regional and international partners bring hope to millions of people in West Africa, the Sahel and beyond. They also attest to the need for responsible multilateralism to address this crisis.

At the international level, the United Nations has launched a \$2 billion coordinated global humanitarian response plan to fund the fight against Covid-19 in the world's poorest countries. It has also called for the cancellation of the debt of African countries.

In addition, the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, has called for a global ceasefire in conflict zones to allow medical personnel and hospital services to provide the necessary health assistance to children and adults infected with the virus. The UN is also working to mobilize partners such as the World Bank, the IMF and the AfDB to address the crisis in a coordinated and effective manner and to organize a way out of it.

At the regional level, the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS have demonstrated their determination and willingness to do everything possible to protect citizens and residents of the Community and combine their efforts to find a lasting solution to the health crisis. At their last extraordinary summit, they decided to implement a range of ambitious measures to intensify and coordinate their actions to combat Covid-19, to draw up a plan to combat its spread and a post-pandemic economic recovery plan, to support the most disadvantaged social strata, to strengthen regional cooperation in research and experience-sharing on the virus and, lastly, to urge Member States to contribute to the Continental Response Fund against Covid-19 in Africa. They also decided to issue long-term treasury bills and bonds to finance critical investment needs, to support the private sector and revive economies; to provide substantial support to the social sectors (distance learning tools, strengthening of health systems and facilities, easy Internet access, etc.), to deploy through the Central Banks, tools, means and significant liquidity to support the financial sector, in particular banks and financial institutions, in providing assistance to the private sector, especially small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), and microfinance institutions in providing support to the informal sector; to mobilise additional resources from the international community to address the economic and social challenges confronting Member States; to implement urgent measures to support the local production of consumer goods, including agricultural products, thereby reducing the import



bill for these goods; to set up a support programme for the pharmaceutical and health protection equipment manufacturing sector, whose output covers barely 20% of the region's current consumption needs.

Also in the region, ECOWAS and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), major partners, stand in solidarity with governments and populations in their fight against Covid-19. In this regard, they also wish to recall two essential ideas that the context of crisis and emergency should not make us forget.

Inclusion and equality

The first is that it is essential that the responses implemented by governments in the region take into account the respect for human rights, inclusion, gender equality, the prevention of violence against women and the fight against stigmatization.

The second concerns elections. 2020 is a year of elections. After Togo where presidential elections were organized last February, five other presidential elections are scheduled to take place in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Niger.

It is important that the decision to maintain or postpone these elections be taken on the basis of an inclusive political consensus, and taking into account the recommendations of medical experts.

The ECOWAS Commission and UNOWAS will continue to work together to help the region emerge from this ordeal stronger and more united.

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“It has been a privilege and an honor for me to serve the United Nations”



After more than thirty years of good and loyal services during which she has occupied several positions, the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Ms. Ruby Sandhu-Rojon, draws her reverence from the United Nations to enjoy a deserved retirement. Interview.

You are leaving the UN on retirement after serving more than three decades at various positions. What can you tell us about the UN?

I would like to recognize the contribution that the United Nations has made to development and peace globally. If we compare the situation 50 years ago to today, we see that there has been tremendous progress in terms of improving people's lives. Girls are able to attend school - and certain





illness - such as polio and guinea worm have been radically reduced or even eradicated in some countries. There has been development in the social, educational, health sectors. There is quite a lot to be done but this is certainly a good achievement. In the political sphere there have been advances in human rights, electoral rights and processes- again still a lot to be done but at least people have the opportunity and the space to speak out. We today recognize rape as a war crime - this is a result of the advocacy of the UN. We recognize that if we do not act on climate change, we will create hardships globally- again this is due to the advocacy of the United Nations. The UN has also created a forum where more than 191 countries can exchange discuss - they may not always agree- although they did agree to the MDGs and the SDGs- which says a lot. There are also instances in peace keeping that the UN contributed to - such as East Timor. Unfortunately, it's the negative that one remembers and for me I remember how the UN has contributed and continues to improve people's lives. If the United Nations didn't exist, we would need to invent it.

What are the key messages/advices you can share with the young generation, particularly women, working for the UN [and outside the UN]?

When I entered the UN more than 30 years ago there were no women Resident Coordinators - today we talk about parity in the number of women resident coordinators. I myself had the opportunity and privilege to serve as a UN Resident Coordinator in Ghana. There is a specific UN agency for the empowerment of women and girls. There are specific leadership trainings for women in middle management in the UN - which didn't exist before. I had the privilege to work in the UNDP when there was a woman leading it for the first



If we compare the situation 50 years ago to today, we see that there has been tremendous progress in terms of improving people's lives.



time. We had 7 women who competed for the role of the Secretary General of the United Nations. That said while there is progress- we still have a long way to go but this augurs well for young women in the UN system and I encourage them to continue to advocate and make noise for change. I do look forward to seeing a woman Secretary General in the future.

You are ending your UN career at the position of DSRSG for West Africa and the Sahel. What can you share with us about your experience as DSRSG serving in this region ?

The West Africa and Sahel region is a dynamic region; there is constantly change in the political, social, humanitarian sphere. We are responding to constant crisis, but we need to think about long term investment. We need to save lives, but we also need to need to support people in building their lives. For stability we need to address more than security- we need to address issues of health, education, social, population. It is a challenging region but is also a region with tremendous opportunity- especially in its youthful population.

At a personnel level, it must be very special to leave the UN after all these years. How do you feel? Any plans for your new life ?

It has been a privilege and an honor for me to serve the United Nations. As I bring my career to an end I leave with very rich experiences and memories of the achievements made by the United Nations. I was able to witness change and contribute to it in some small fashion and I am privileged to have been given that opportunity. We live today in a world that is confronted with many challenges that required a concerted response and yet there is resistance to a multi-lateral approach. My time in the UN confirms my belief that it is only through multilateralism that we will be able to find solutions for sustainable development.



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In the context of COVID-19, a collective and multidimensional response is necessary to consolidate peace in West Africa and the Sahel



Concerned about the spread of the pandemic, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened on 22 April 2020 a virtual meeting to discuss the impact of COVID-19 in West Africa and the Sahel. To the ambassadors of several member states participating in the meeting, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas and the Assistant Secretary General for Peacebuilding, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, gave an update on the situation in the sub-region.

Under the chairmanship of the Permanent Representative of Canada, Marc André-Blanchard, the first virtual meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) entirely devoted to the impact of COVID-19 on the consolidation efforts of peace in West Africa and the Sahel, was held. During this meeting, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas and the Assistant Secretary-General of Peacebuilding, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco have informed and exchanged with the various ambassadors on, especially, the nature of the impact of COVID-19, and on the international support required to maintain the efforts provided for peacebuilding and to strengthen the commitment towards sustainable peace and development in the sub-region.



Give priority to consensus

The COVID-19 has exposed underlying governance gaps but is also a test of the capacity of national institutions to address the needs of the population, noted the Special Representative, Ibn Chambas in his intervention, before highlighting the importance of supporting governance structures and building resilience at the community level to adequately respond to this challenge in the short, medium and long term.

2020 is an important year for the consolidation of democratic gains in West Africa and the Sahel. Several major countries will hold presidential elections: Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Niger. But with the COVID-19 which continues to threaten the lives of millions of people and whose consequences on national and sub-regional economies raise fears of a recession and a significant drop in economic growth, the issue of whether elections should be organized or not is now at the center of the debates.

Addressing this issue, the Special Representative, Mr. Ibn Chambas, warned that the pandemic could have serious repercussions on the high-stakes electoral processes scheduled for the end of the year. «There is a need for concerted efforts to ensure consensus in responding to the effects of COVID-19 on the electoral processes.»

During his briefing, Mr. Ibn Chambas also expressed his concerns for the growing attacks by extremist and terrorist groups during this period of pandemic, further aggravating the humanitarian crisis. He stressed that the combination of all these factors will lead to increased unemployment, extreme poverty and the likelihood of increased social dissatisfaction. In this regard, He reiterated the appeals launched by the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, in favor of debt suspension, and pleaded for the continuation of bilateral and multilateral support for the humanitarian aid as well as for efforts to prevent and combat violent extremism. The Special Representative also stressed the need to support the participation of communities, especially women, youth and people with disabilities, traditional, religious and civic leaders in decision-making processes.

A coordinated international response

For his part, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, stressed that the COVID-19 crisis required a multidimensional and transversal response, and in direct link with the Sustainable Development Goals, of Member States, international and regional organi-



The COVID-19 has exposed underlying governance gaps but is also a test of the capacity of national institutions to address the needs of the population





zations, financial institutions, civil society and businesses. He informed that the Peacebuilding Commission has adapted quickly to the impact of COVID-19 and is providing a unique platform for international solidarity, including through supporting predictable financing and strong partnerships for peacebuilding and sustaining peace in West Africa and the Sahel.

The countries represented at the meeting also made strong recommendations for an immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly focused on the health and humanitarian sectors, which should be, according to them, accompanied by medium and long-term investments in basic social services, governance, economy, agriculture, environment and development. They also noted the need to strengthen coherence, coordination and collaboration between national, regional and international partners such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the African Development Bank (AFDB) to avoid duplication of efforts, and ensure collective responsibility and support adapted to the specific contexts of the countries, while optimizing the different capacities and resources.

Echoing the various interventions by the representatives of member states, the Special Representative recalled that “Business continuity of the West Africa and Sahel governments is a key area that we should be supporting, targeting key areas beyond health, but also those that will reinforce peace and stability.”

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Women, a centerpiece in the fight against COVID-19 and its effects



2020, is a symbolic year for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Indeed, it has been twenty years since the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on the participation of women in peace and security efforts. 2020 will be forever remembered, with the COVID-19 pandemic which, beyond being a health crisis, raises profound economic, social and security challenges. This pandemic has had harmful effects on the populations, particularly the most vulnerable, such as girls and women.

COVID-19 pandemic impacts women

According to a UN policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on women, published on 9 April 2020, nearly 60 per cent of women around the world work in the informal economy, earning less, saving less, and at greater risk of falling into poverty. Women make up more than 70 per cent of the world's health workers, and women's unpaid care work has increased due to school closings and the increased needs of the elderly.

At the regional level, a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on the Gender, Women, Peace and Security agenda conduc-



Women and young people are working alongside Senegalese civil society organizations to distribute masks to populations, with the support of UN Women. Photo: UN Women.



ted in May by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) , in collaboration with the National Representatives to the 17 member countries of the Women, Youth, Peace and Security Working Group in West Africa and the Sahel (WYPSWG-WAS) reveals that men are more affected by COVID-19 than women and that the economic impact is strongly felt by those who work in the informal sector.

Like everywhere else in the world, it should also be noted that an increase in domestic violence against women, exacerbated by the fall in income due to confinement, curfew or reduction in working hours. The survey also found that the school closures have wiped out efforts to keep girls in school..

Women and youth at the heart of the response to COVID-19

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has urged all governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key component of their national response plans. Guterres also encouraged « governments to put women and girls at the centre of their efforts to recover from COVID-19”. « That starts with women as leaders, with equal representation and decision-making power,» he declared.

Along the same lines, the Special Representative, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, urged the countries of the sub-region to «take all the necessary measures to place young people and women at the heart of decision-making and ensure their participation in the response process to the spread of the disease. «

The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Rosemary A. DiCarlo, the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre François Renaud Lacroix, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka, jointly launched an appeal recognizing the central role that women play in peacebuilding, particularly through their efforts to make a global ceasefire possible. According to them, the COVID-19 pandemic is a strong signal and the world cannot cope with wars and the pandemic at the same time. “When women are involved, the prospects for lasting peace are better. Women are often mediators between communities, and between governments and their citizens,” they said.



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“Africa’s development will not happen without digital technology”

The current situation caused by the global health crisis COVID-19, has given rise to exceptional bursts of solidarity and creativity. In West Africa and the Sahel, talented young people have put their creativity at the service of their country and the region to tackle the consequences of the pandemic.

At only 24 years old, Fabrice Teeg-Wendé Guéné is the co-founder of BRISCOM, a digital communications agency that supports companies in their communication, web-marketing and digitalization of their processes. He created the Ecole Digitale (Digital School), an online teaching platform to allow students to continue their studies from home following the closure of schools, colleges and universities due to the pandemic. Interview.



Who is Fabrice Teeg-Wendé Guéné? tell us briefly about yourself.

I’m a young digital entrepreneur. I am 24 years old and have a degree in communication and journalism. I have a great passion for digital and communication. I am the co-founder of BRISCOM, a digital communications agency.



You are passionate about digital communication, how digital tools are important in our societies, particularly in Africa?

For me, to most of the challenges of our African societies, there is a digital solution. Digital does not do everything but can be invaluable. The dematerialization of certain operations contributes enormously to the improvement of life conditions and security. Thanks to mobile banking, for example, people are further able to protect their money. Digital technology contributes to bringing education to remote areas that are sometimes inaccessible because of scourges such as terrorism. We must not forget that innovations in health that enable disadvantaged communities to benefit from remote diagnosis and management of diseases. With digital the scope of possibilities is vast. It remains for inventors and innovators to explore these opportunities and solutions to boost development. Africa's development will not happen without digital technology. On the contrary, I believe that digital is the gateway, the channel through which Africa will assert what it has to offer to the world.

Recently, you created Ecole Digitale, an online teaching platform, to help students who have had to stop school because of the COVID-19 pandemic. How and why did you embark on this project?

Briscom aims to be a generator of digital solutions to society's problems. In light of the crisis and the closure of classrooms, we felt it was our duty to contribute to the fight. This is how we decided to make the courses accessible to as many students as possible through internet. And the idea of Ecole Digitale was born. We immediately started the project with our own means. 3 weeks later we launched the beta version. But the development work is still ongoing.

Beyond the coronavirus issue, École Digitale meets three Sustainable Development Goals: Access to Education (SDG 4), Equal Opportunity (SDG 10) and Collaboration to Achieve Goals (SDG 17). Since terrorism has led to the closure of hundreds of schools, it is important that children in these areas have access to the same education rights as others. With the high failure rate in recent years on school exams, École Digitale plans to also provide free school support for all students in order to ensure equal opportunities for success.

The first stage of the project was the technical implementation of the platform. After three weeks we had completed



For me, to most of the challenges of our African societies, there is a digital solution



this stage. The second was to find the content. We have therefore federated a local and qualified teaching team made up of certified teachers, supervised by national education inspectors to ensure high-quality courses on the platform. Currently we are working to make an interactive space for discussion between students and available teachers so that students can ask questions if necessary, in order to facilitate their learning.

Is the platform operational in an efficient and satisfactory manner?

Yes, the platform is open and functional. But there is still a lot of work to achieve, such as the finalization of the interactive exchange space, the publication of middle school courses (the entire CP1 to the Senior Year program) and the operationalization of personalized and free school support for all students. We set our priorities on exam classes to prevent the emergency. We will have content soon for middle classes, but the lack of permanent staff slows down the process. But the platform works, and students have access to the courses.

We have been working since the beginning of the initiative to get in touch with the Ministry of National Education. In view of the cumbersome administration and the resulting delays, we have decided to continue our action and then to contact them as soon as possible. Our priority is to get the quality labeling of our content from the Ministry of National Education to reassure students and parents about the quality of the content. Teachers and inspectors have been with us since the beginning on a totally voluntary basis. They produce courses, exercises, assessments. They will also remain available on the platform to assist students who may need them.

We have also managed to get from Orange Burkina the insertion of Ecole Digitale, in their education package which is usually accessible at 100 F/day and has become free during this the crisis of Coronavirus.

What are the obstacles that block the effective launching of the platform?

We would like to have a labeling of the content that is produced by teachers. For now, the courses are validated upstream by inspectors who are kindly helping us. Financial means to recruit dedicated and permanent staff are lacking! It would also be good to be able to encourage teachers who have so far accompanied us in a totally voluntary way.



Currently we are working to make an interactive space for discussion between students and available teachers so that students can ask questions if necessary, in order to facilitate their learning



For now, we have no support from the government or any other partner. The financial need to support the operating costs of the platform is quite high and any assistance we could receive would be very useful in making the platform work to the best of its potential, much to the delight of the students.

Could your platform be used in countries of the sub-region, for example?

The platform is duplicable elsewhere. We thought of it and designed it that way. We would like to give students from other African countries the opportunity to use Ecole Digitale. Burkina Faso can be considered as a pilot project.

To duplicate the model elsewhere, we will need a qualified teaching team at the local level to produce the courses according to the program of each country. We will also need a powerful technical (host) infrastructure to support the traffic load that each site could generate.

Do you have other plans? do you think you can get the support you need to achieve them?

Yes, we have several other projects that we are working on. We are in several sectors, including education, employability, health, entrepreneurship, real estate, etc. There is no shortage of needs, the first of course being the financial and partnership need.

For example, we are working on a project that we have named Yidgri which means fulfillment in Mooré. It is a project that involves the creation of an online training platform for entrepreneurs. Specialized training adapted to the African context to enable African entrepreneurs to improve their resilience accordingly in order to avoid as much as possible to create stillborn businesses as it is the case today!

Public authority is difficult to mobilize based on a simple project, especially today as everyone has a project. That's why we always work relying on our personal resources. This allows us to launch a prototype we can present when searching public or private partnerships.



For now, we have no support from the government or any other partner

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Between anxiety and optimism, Senegalese people coping with the COVID-19 pandemic



Between anxiety and optimism, Senegalese people, like their neighbours in West Africa and the Sahel, continue to face the COVID-19 pandemic with determination and responsibility.

It is almost 8 PM! Usually so lively, the streets of Almadies (Dakar) lined with restaurants and night clubs, are empty. With pressed but firm gestures, Omar quickly packs his fruit display like someone bundling a box intended for urgent delivery. Installed for years in a busy street of Almadies, Omar is used to serve a loyal clientele until late night. But, to his dismay, Omar must respect the terms of the curfew imposed in recent days by the Senegalese government to combat the spread of the COVID-19. From now on, any commercial activity and movement of people must stop between 8pm and 5am.

Like many countries in the world and in the sub-region, Senegal has had to react quickly to the global threat of Coronavirus. Combating the spread of the virus and protecting the entire population had become the Senegalese government's top priority.

▲ The city of Dakar, capital of Senegal is empty of all its beautiful people and all traffic of vehicles during the times of the curfew decreed because of COVID-19



«This moment is unprecedented in the history of mankind. Now the infinitely small makes the whole world tremble, in a brutal, rapid and massive way; ignoring borders; indiscriminately striking rich and poor countries, and without regard for the social status,» said President Macky Sall in his speech to the nation on 23 March, referring to Article 69 of the Constitution and Law 69-29 of 29 April 1969, to establish a state of emergency with a curfew from 8pm to 6am over the national territory. This is the first flagship measure that will be followed by a series of other important measures, including the creation of a Response and Solidarity Fund against the effects of COVID-19, FORCE COVID-19, with 1,000 billion Franc CFA and whose objective is to meet the budgetary, economic, social, health and security requirements of the fight against COVID-19.

Like other countries in West Africa and the Sahel, Senegal has continued to adapt to the evolution of the pandemic while responding to the spread of the pandemic three months after Macky Sall's declaration. Now, following the government's decision to relax some measures, including the curfew, Omar, the fruit merchant, can finally push a sigh of relief, he can now sell his fruit until 11pm instead of 8pm, the initial curfew schedule. «Frankly, these are difficult times that we are enduring. But I'm glad, I can stay later to sell my fruits» he says enthusiastically.

Like Omar, many Senegalese have respected the arrangements put in place under the state of emergency and have complied with binding measures to protect themselves and others from the ongoing COVID-19 threat. But given the sharp economic slowdown and its already visible consequences, especially on the unemployment rate and productivity, many Senegalese no longer hide their concern.

Maryam Diouf, a young single woman, waitress in a reputable restaurant on the ledge is bitter. «My employer paid me for the first month, and since then I've been unemployed with no help or financial resources.» The same bitterness is shared by Alassane Ndoeye, manager of a family hotel of 20 rooms in Somone (region of Mbour) who simply had to close the establishment. «Because of this virus, we are out of business, we have not received any tourists since March,» laments Alassane.

Indeed, tourism and all activities related to this major economic sector in Senegal have been, like other economic areas, strongly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, despite the conti-

**The President Macky Sall
Address to the Nation on
March 23, 2020.**



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nued mobilization of the government, which is multiplying initiatives to support the national economy and households.

While the impact of the pandemic on socio-economic life is causing legitimate and growing concerns, the impact of the spread of the virus is just as growing among many Senegalese. Marie Fall, a young doctor, said in a firm voice that «the virus is not gone. We must remain vigilant and continue to respect measures to protect ourselves and save lives. It's important,».

And the young doctor is right! According to government figures, as of 24 June 2020, Senegal has seen a marked increase in contamination and deaths. Today, the country has 93 deaths and 6,129 people tested positive for COVID-19.

But under the socio-economic reality, many countries in the sub-region and elsewhere have already relaxed the measures taken in the context of the fight against COVID-19. According to Mohamed Beye, a sociologist, « Now It seems necessary to initiate a return to normal life while keeping the health measures and adapting the others [measures] in a progressive and responsible way, because the current situation is not sustainable.» Indeed, like the other leaders in West Africa, President Macky Sall, had made it clear in his last speech on the COVID-19 crisis, «that we must live with the virus».

The appearance of COVID-19 is a major challenge for all countries of the world. And dealing with this unprecedented crisis is certainly not an easy task. «It will be necessary to maintain a sacred union and a determination of all political, economic, health and civil actors to definitely get rid of this virus,» added Marie Fall, who wants to remain optimistic.

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