



Innovative civic initiatives by young people to strengthen their role in post-COVID-19.

INNOVATION BY YOUNG PEOPLES



CCRDA
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Innovative civic initiatives by young people to strengthen their role in post-COVID-19.

How African youth are innovating in response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is testing the resilience of national education systems, economies and job markets, highlighting the digital divide, income inequality, and workforce fragility around the world. In Africa, the virus has kept millions of children and young people out of school, exacerbating an existing education crisis. According to the International Labor Organization, youths have been disproportionately affected, suffering rapid increases in unemployment since the pandemic's onset.

Young people between the ages of 14 and 24 make up one-fifth of Africa's population, with numbers projected to increase over the next three decades. Africa's young people are therefore the most important source of human capital for the continent and constitute its engine of growth. To successfully respond to this crisis and "build back better" for the long term, African leaders must strategically partner with youth to leverage their innovation, creative ideas, labor and resourcefulness.

The most important way that African leaders can purposefully engage with young people is by investing in quality foundational education. To do this, the pedagogy of education in Africa must change. Foundational learning must reflect the needs of the local economy, but also help youth compete globally. Education must focus on key competencies, such as literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and critical thinking.

Yet, despite these setbacks, youth-led innovations and civic initiatives in education, health and other sectors have flourished. Young people worldwide have taken action to prevent the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact. These initiatives highlight the need for immediate and significant action to mitigate the long-term effects of this crisis.

COVID-19 has proven the ability of young Africans to innovate in the face of a crisis. Community-based responses are an important part of the fight against COVID-19, and this is where many youths have emerged as leaders and front-line responders.

They have risen to the challenge in diverse ways, from combatting the spread of misinformation in their communities to conducting handwashing awareness campaigns. They have generated ideas and led actions, hosted discussions and disseminated information through social media and public awareness campaigns, saving countless lives. ^[1]

USING SOCIAL MEDIA AND APPS TO SPREAD ACCURATE INFORMATION

According to medical doctor Hashim Hounkpatin of Benin, there are two diseases currently spreading around the world in a viral manner: COVID-19 and fake news. The vaccine for both? “Good information.” Hashim, who launched a mass literacy program in Francophone Africa called Arayaa, teamed up with a consortium of health-related content producers to organize a Tweet chat about how to keep safe against COVID-19. Their hashtag #AgirContreCOVID19 has reached more than 90,000 participants to date. Additionally, they are designing an app that displays trusted knowledge in local languages and allows users to interact directly with experts for help. ^[2]



FIG 1. A graphic shared in Hashim's #AgirContreCOVID19 Twitter Chat to stop misinformation.

Solar-powered Hand Washing Basin

In Ghana, where GPE's COVID response is supporting continued learning, recovery and resilience for basic education, young engineer Richard Kwarteng and his brother Jude Osei developed a solar-powered hand-washing basin.

The basin is equipped with sensors and an alarm to ensure that hands are washed for 20 seconds in accordance with guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO). The brothers are also working with the Ghanaian government to determine if additional basins can be produced and placed in cities throughout the country. [3]



FIG 2. Richard Kwarteng says he plans to help stop the spread of the virus by making the device available throughout the continent

In Cameroon, where GPE's COVID response is supporting a return to safe and protective schools through hygiene measures such as disinfection of schools and handwashing programs, the Local Youth Corner association launched the One Person One Hand Sanitizer campaign, which has produced and dispensed over 10,000 bottles of hand sanitizer to communities. The campaign also emphasizes raising awareness of hygiene practices to halt the spread of COVID-19 and receives support from the Cameroonian Ministry of Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Health.

Doctor Car

That creativity echoed across the continent. In Dakar, Senegal students at the Polytechnic Superior School invented the "Doctor Car", a robot that can safely roam the corridors of a hospital with quarantined patients. The robot, equipped with cameras, is remotely controlled via a phone application by a nurse who uses the metallic assistant to monitor the vital signs, deliver drugs, food and hand sanitizer to patients among other

activities. The robot can also speak the main local languages, including Wolof, Pulaar, French and English. [3]

Robot

In Tunisia, a police robot called the "PGuard" has been deployed to patrol areas in the capital, Tunis, to ensure that people observe lockdown rules. When its camera spots anyone walking in the largely deserted streets, the remote-controlled robot approaches the person and asks why they are out. They must then show their identity documents and other papers to the robot's camera, so officers can safely check them. [3]

Artificial Intelligence for X-rays

With the support of GIZ, the German international development agency, since mid-March 2020, the Italian Society of Medical Radiology and US tech giant IBM, teachers and students at the Tunisian engineering and technology institute (INSAT) have been developing a web-based platform that scans lung X-rays and evaluates whether patients are likely to be suffering from the novel coronavirus (AI for X-rays). While it is not the first initiative of its kind in the world, its creators say it is the first to be openly available. Although it is not a diagnostic tool, the technology reportedly provides a "90 percent" reliable indication of the probability of infection. Thousands of X-rays of the lungs of both healthy people and COVID-19 patients have been fed into the platform, allowing artificial intelligence to learn to recognize signs of the virus on the lungs. The technology simply requires an X-ray image and an internet connection which makes it particularly useful in areas of the country that lack major hospitals and specialist doctors. [3]

Social, economic and political challenges caused by COVID-19

It is clear that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will have severe global health, social, and economic impact on people and economies. To date, the science and statistics indicate that while the youth and children are

not bearing the brunt of the COVID-19, measures to curb the spread of the virus, will impact the youth very severely. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 99 per cent of the children and youth under 18 years worldwide (2.34 billion) is living in one of the 186 countries with some form of movement restrictions in place due to COVID-19. Sixty percent of all children live in one of the 82 countries with full (7%) or partial (53%) lockdown – accounting for 1.4 billion young lives.

Many governments have temporarily closed schools and universities to curb the spread of COVID-19 in academic institutions. This has disrupted the education of more than 1.57 billion (91%) students worldwide. Some of the young people are unlikely going to return school permanently due to the loss of parents' lives and income. UNICEF records that over 1 billion children and youth are out of school globally, due to the pandemic.

The disparate effect on education across the world – related to the availability of digital infrastructure and equipment in developing countries. In developed countries education for many has continued via e-learning. In most developing countries, this is available to the very few. The lack of access to education for such an extended time will exacerbate inequality for future generations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed job losses and can be expected to lead to adjustments post-pandemic with further losses. The impact in Africa, which is facing massive demographic shifts, with a so-called youth dividend, will be severe. Over 170 million people will join the continent's workforce in the next five years. 'This youth boom, combined with the sudden disappearance of education and job opportunities, threatens to replace progress with poverty and grievance. [4]

Policy actions for recovery

If left unaddressed, the impact of the COVID-19 on the youth will perpetuate socio-economic problems of the youth, and ultimately undermine

development prospects for African countries. Failure to improve the prospects for the youth will expose nations to civil and political unrest, violence, illegal immigration, a rise in drug use and crime.

A global response post-COVID-19 recovery is needed. The impact of COVID-19 can be best addressed through multilateralism and collective response.

‘The COVID-19 pandemic has re-emphasized the importance of a multilateral approach to sustainable development, as well as the importance of combining social, economic and environmental priorities.’ Developing, and especially least-developed countries cannot do this on their own. They will need financial and non-financial assistance from development partners and development financial institutions. These partners will need to work with a range of domestic stakeholders – government, private sector, and civil society – and the youth has to play an important role to shape their future. Policies that are forward-looking reducing the damages caused by COVID-19 and resilient to future crises.

- The youth should be at the center of the post-COVID-19 recovery plans. Sectors like tourism, agribusiness, information and communication technology, and other services show potential for large scale productivity growth and job creation. Young people are already stepping up as entrepreneurs in these sectors. They need access to capital to start and grow businesses. Innovative financial and loan instruments which move beyond the current predominant asset-based collateral requirements for access to finance. Young people should also be given other business-related support from both the public and private sectors. Education or vocational training can equip young people with the skills necessary for future jobs and economies. Enhancing education in areas related to the demands of the digital economy, improves the quality of the workforce and enterprise.

- We are starting to see innovative public-private partnerships (PPPs) to develop a COVID-19 vaccine or related pharmaceutical products that offer lessons in creating shared value. For example, Germany, France, Italy and Netherlands formed an Inclusive Vaccine Alliance to negotiate with potential developers and manufacturers for the COVID-19 vaccine, and want to involve the European Commission in the negotiations. These governments have signed an agreement with AstraZeneca – a British pharmaceutical firm – to supply hundreds of million doses of its potential COVID-19 vaccines to the EU. Public, private, philanthropic, and civil society organizations through initiatives such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) are 'working together to accelerate the development of vaccines against emerging infectious diseases and enable equitable access to these vaccines for people during outbreaks.' Creating shared value across stakeholders, should also bridge the social divides and actively engage the youth.
- Universities and postgraduate can contribute meaningfully to research and development, innovation and the development of medical products. For instance, South African universities are collaborating to develop the Sars-CoV-2 strain (University of the Western Cape and Stellenbosch University) and producing antigens and antibodies required for rapid diagnostic COVID-19 test kits (University of Cape Town).
- PPPs can also be leveraged to address many challenges of the youth, not only during COVID-19 but beyond the pandemic. COVID-19 is accelerating the transition to digital economies. Therefore, PPPs should aim to address challenges or provide opportunities for the youth in a digital 21st economy. PPPs can assist to create opportunities in productive services and digital technologies. The MultiChoice Group

has recently partnered with Youth Employment Service to create 500 jobs for South African youth. Amazon has recently created new 3000 permanent and seasonal full-time work from home (virtual) jobs in South Africa, which require someone with home electronic or internet support, and digital capabilities to support the company's customer enquiries.

- Companies can help through learner ships, graduate and internship programs. Educated youth with the necessary skills (ICT and digital skills) and some experience is a vital contributor to a growing and sustainable economy. Graduate unemployment has become prevalent in many African countries – companies can provide a step-up for new graduates through learner ships and internships. Having some experience, a big difference in the labor market.
- Development partners and development financial institutions should provide necessary resources to achieve the work towards post-COVID-19 recovery plans. International organizations can strengthen and support cooperation to promote youth development, through joint advocacy or initiatives. For example, UNICEF launched a Global Agenda for Action to protect vulnerable children from harm. The Agenda has six pillars: keep children healthy and safe; reach vulnerable children with water, sanitation, and hygiene; keep children learning; support families to cover their needs and care for their children; protect children from violence, exploitation, and abuse; and protect refugees and migrants, children and those affected by conflict. Implementing the pillars of this agenda could make a big difference to the lives of many children and young people. Governments should be active in implementing these initiatives. Leaving such initiatives to civil

society is abdicating a fundamental responsibility to children and youth.

Governments should actively seek to partner with and support youth initiatives across the economy. We need to recognize the enormous potential of Africa's youth – they have an important role to play in Africa's post-COVID-19 recovery. ^[4]

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