

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT / JANUARY 2021****The Covid-19 Pandemic in the IGAD Region: Impact on Health and the Economy<sup>1</sup>**

The Covid crisis has cast its dark shadow in the IGAD region at the worst time as it came on top of the problems of weak or fragile states, lack of capacity, wide spread poverty and food insecurity, conflicts, and the desert locust invasion. Many of the member countries are also under major economic difficulties and have significant vulnerable populations, and large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. In addition to persistent fiscal and balance of payment deficits, debt burden, high inflation, foreign exchange shortage, and high unemployment (in the absence of social security), they are facing multiple shocks such as recurrent drought, floods, and conflict and common vulnerabilities such as environment degradation, land pressure, food insecurity malnutrition, limited access to health services and sanitation. Moreover, the region has an estimated 30 million pastoral population that move across borders, hence are less reachable with awareness and protection measures. Pre-covid-19 health service availability and distribution were grossly insufficient even for normal situations. Limited access to water and sanitation, poverty, poor nutrition and health, and weak health services exacerbated these risks. Social-distancing, 'staying at home' and 'working from home' were not feasible in the face of crowded settlements and high importance of daily jobs and informal income among the population. The countries were exposed to both the direct effects of the pandemic and the pandemic-induced recession in the developed countries, affecting both the demand and supply sides as they constitute key export destinations and import sources.

This study provides an overview of the pre-COVID socio-economic situation and state of health services, the IGAD health framework and health service cooperation and collaboration among member countries, and discusses the outbreak and spread of the virus, and its broad adverse health, economic and social impacts. It then discusses the rescue and social safety net measures being taken and financing, and highlights some key issues that recovery efforts in the region should take into account, stressing the importance of sustainability and inclusivity. It is based on review of the continental and IGAD frameworks for health services, analysis of data from key multilateral organisations including the World Bank, IMF and WHO, the country cases studies on the Impact of COVID-19 that HESPI conducted in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Sudan, as well as other studies on the IGAD sub region.

Despite the quick responses in setting health response mechanisms, awareness creation, and introducing rescue measures, lags in supply and affordability of face masks and sanitizing materials proved a challenge. Failure to observe regular use of masks and social distancing together with the difficulty to sustain lockdowns and restrictions exacerbated the situation. The level and spread of infection, which had remained relatively low for several months, thus accelerated considerably, with rising community infections.

The large scale infection across the globe and its resurgence in many countries as well as occurrence of a second-wave means that the recession will be deep and prolonged, making recovery slow. With almost all major trading partners and bilateral funders of the IGAD countries as well as major destinations of migration from the region affected, the health, economic and social impacts are considerable; essential health services have been disrupted as human, financial and institutional resources are switched to deal with the pandemic emergency; schooling (from early childhood to tertiary and TVET) has been disrupted with implications on human capital; overall growth, revenue,

exports, remittance, FDI and aid flows have suffered with consequences on economic activities, jobs and poverty. Governments, citizens and the private sector have taken a range of rescue measures to 'save lives, businesses and jobs'; the fiscal, monetary, foreign exchange, and social safety net measures were complemented by cash and in-kind contributions by citizens, business organisations and CSOs. In some cases, country-specific contexts allowed effective use of certain rescue measures, although they could not be sustained.

Initiating appropriate measures for fast and sustainable recovery is essential. With careful design the recovery measures may offer an opportunity to rebuild in ways that are not only in line with the SDGs but also green and strengthen future resilience to shocks. Policy support thus need to include green stimulus. In the spirit of "leaving no one behind", the recovery should also be designed to be inclusive that benefits the wider population across the countries including those in rural areas and small towns as well as vulnerable groups such as women & girls, youth, refugees. While this may necessitate revisiting development strategies and policy incentives and re-prioritisation of budget expenditures, care should be exercised not to pre-empt recovery by attaching undue short term targets or funding conditionality.

In view of the scale and impact of the pandemic countries are realising the need for a coordinated actions and partnership. For example, the ASEAN countries deem it necessary to adopt an ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, which is a consolidated exit strategy from the pandemic, articulating their response to the pandemic focusing on key sectors and segments of society that are most affected, with broad strategies set and recovery measures that are in line with sectoral and regional priorities identified. The IGAD secretariat may be best placed to initiate and coordinate similar effort in the region.

Making design of recovery packages consultative and evidence-based is crucial in this respect. IGAD could take the lead in initiating and supporting research, analysis and policy advice and facilitating consultative processes to draw on the pool of knowledge and expertise in the region so as to design recovery packages (with possible regional components) well-grounded in the context.