

A Post-Covid-19 Reset

The Future of Africa's Foreign Partnerships

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- **The Covid-19 pandemic is upending relationships between African governments and external partners, creating an opportunity for a hard reset and a reprioritization of strategic issues.** Key focus areas will include Covid-19 recovery, debt relief, anti-discrimination, democratization, security challenges, and climate change.
- **Regional governments and publics have been increasingly forthright with their frustrations with foreign partners—criticizing vaccine nationalism, racism abroad, and the asymmetry of bilateral ties.** At the same time, there is often tension between what African governments want, what African publics expect, and what external partners choose to prioritize.
- **To chart a new path, Africa's foreign partners and regional governments must take measures—some more difficult than others—to mend and deepen ties.** There is no easy fix; rebuilding relationships will require patience, persistence, and an openness to break from past practices.

A new relationship is possible. In the wake of a once-in-a-century pandemic, there is an opportunity for sub-Saharan African countries and their external counterparts to establish more equitable, collaborative, and constructive partnerships. While the region so far has curbed a massive spread of Covid-19, it remains mired in an economic crisis and vexed about insufficient assistance from the outside world. African governments and publics are asking for greater equity in vaccine distribution, more generous debt relief, and targeted investment in key economic sectors. Moreover, African leaders say they are fed up with the unequal treatment in the global community, the harassment of their citizens abroad, and the zero-sum premise of global power competition.

If a reset is in the offing, Africans and their international partners need to be clear-eyed about the trends reshaping the region. It is also necessary to manage

expectations: there almost certainly will be tensions and trade-offs about what is needed, what is wanted, and what is possible in a post-Covid-19 world. Building new relations will take foresight and persistence; African and international governments will need to tackle pressing challenges with an eye toward addressing and resolving enduring threats and systematic barriers to peace, prosperity, and equitable partnerships.

AFRICA'S POST-PANDEMIC PRIORITIES

In a post-Covid-19 world, sub-Saharan African countries will wrestle with seven policy imperatives. While the first two challenges stem directly from the pandemic and related upheaval, the other five have troubled the region for years. These recent and longstanding dynamics are reshaping sub-Saharan Africa, spurring a recalibration of its foreign ties.

- **Recover from Covid-19.** As of late February 2021, the African continent had recorded 3.8 million Covid-19

infections and just over 100,000 deaths. The region has recorded lower caseloads than some countries around the world, and many African governments have been swift to impose restrictions such as shutting schools and religious institutions and putting cities on lockdown. South Africa, which accounts for almost half of the region's infections, is battling a new, more deadly variant of the virus.¹ In addition, mortalities from other diseases have spiked, and the region is not expected to widely receive vaccine shots until 2022 or 2023.²

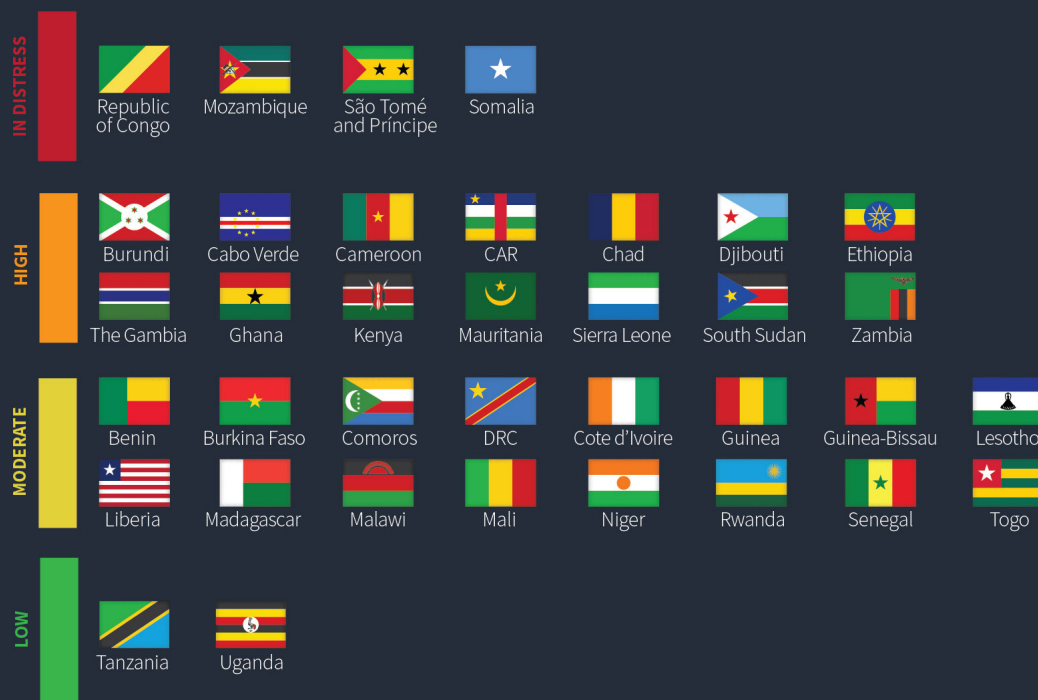
- **Revive regional economies.** Sub-Saharan Africa is entering a recession for the first time in 25 years. The disruption to trade and tourism, suspension of investments, and impact of lockdowns and other restrictions have sent the region's economies into a tailspin. According to the World Bank, Covid-19 could push up to 40 million people into extreme poverty,

erasing at least five years of progress in fighting poverty.³ Most countries face large budget deficits and have been crippled by debt obligations, of which relief has been either insufficient or granted only on a case-by-case basis.

- **Redress global discrimination.** The region's leaders and publics are livid about the treatment of their fellow citizens and diaspora in China and the United States. Senior Nigerian officials have publicly chastised Chinese diplomats for racist violence in Guangzhou and African Union (AU) commission chair Moussa Faki Mahamat issued a statement rejecting the "continuing discriminatory practices against Black citizens of the United States of America."⁴ African outrage was compounded by the Trump administration's attacks on World Health Organization (WHO) director-general Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, its bid to block African Development

AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS IN DEBT DISTRESS DURING COVID-19

Many sub-Saharan African governments were already struggling to pay off external debt before the pandemic hit. Now, they are at an even greater risk of debt distress due to Covid-19. Not only has the pandemic brought income-generating activities to a halt, but governments are now cash-strapped to purchase PPE and vaccines. The below table depicts countries' risk of external debt distress, which includes debt from commercial lenders, as measured by the World Bank as part of its Debt Service Suspension Initiative.



Source: World Bank data and ranking via the Debt Service Suspension Initiative database ("Covid-19: Debt Service Suspension Initiative," The World Bank, February 19, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/covid-19-debt-service-suspension-initiative>).

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Bank (AfDB) president Akinwumi Adesina's reelection, and its opposition to Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's candidacy for director-general at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

- **Reaffirm democratic values.** African governments, opposition, and civil society are locked in a battle over the future of democracy and governance in the region. While almost 70 percent of Africans say democracy is their preferred type of government, there have been alarming setbacks and curtailments of rights in several countries. According to Freedom House, a total of 22 African countries suffered score declines in 2019.⁵ In the middle of the pandemic, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire's presidents secured third terms in office, Uganda and Tanzania's leaders repeatedly detained opposition candidates, and Ethiopia's prime minister twice imposed a communication blackout to silence protestors and the media.
- **Reframe global power competition.** African leaders are publicly rebuking international partners, especially the United States and China, for entangling the region in

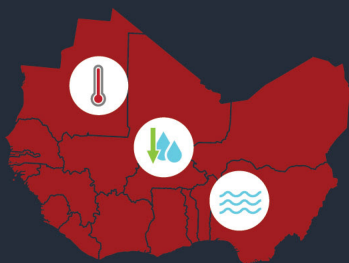
their geopolitical jousting. In February 2020, Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta accused external powers of "weaponizing divisions, pursuing proxy actions, and behaving like Africa is for the taking."⁶ Other leaders, including South African president Cyril Ramaphosa, have issued similar warnings about the implications of—and their opposition to—heightened foreign competition in the region.⁷ African governments, while aware of the potential benefits of playing one side off the other, are leery of its zero-sum nature and the threats it may pose to their reputation, economic independence, governance, and internal cohesion.

- **Resolve urgent security challenges.** Sub-Saharan African governments are struggling to silence the guns in conflict zones in the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, Horn of Africa, eastern Congo, and northern Mozambique. Many of the region's militaries have been outmatched, outplayed, and overpowered by insurgents aligned with al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. The fighting has resulted in a surge of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); internal displacement in the Sahel has

CLIMATE CRISIS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

West Africa, East Africa, and southern Africa are experiencing a variety of severe weather patterns brought on by climate change. Governments will have to revisit and refresh existing climate-related efforts with regional bodies such as ECOWAS, EAC, and SADC—as well as international multilateral institutions like the United Nations Environment Programme—to hone adaptation and mitigation solutions and explore options like climate-for-debt swaps. The below information is drawn from regional USAID fact sheets which did not include central Africa.

West Africa



East Africa



Southern Africa



Rising temperatures



Increased average precipitation



Decreased average precipitation



Rising sea levels



Locusts

Source: USAID, "Climate Change Adaptation in East Africa," climatelinks, https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/east_africa_adaptation_fact_sheet_feb2012.pdf; USAID, "Climate Change Adaptation in Western Africa," climatelinks, https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/west_africa_adaptation_fact_sheet_jan2012%20%281%29.pdf; USAID, "Climate Change Adaptation in Southern Africa," climatelinks, https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/southern_africa_adaptation_fact_sheet_jan2012.pdf.

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quadrupled within the past two years, from 500,000 to 2 million people.⁸ In Ethiopia, a civil war between the federal government and the former ruling party, Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), has displaced more than 2.2 million people and ensnared neighboring Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan in the conflict.⁹

- **Respond to climate change.** African countries are grappling with the severe consequences of climate change in their societies. Even though their contributions to global greenhouse gas emissions are small, the region's countries are the most vulnerable to and least prepared for the extreme weather patterns brought on by a warming climate. During the 2019 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) speeches, sub-Saharan African leaders across 48 countries used the term "climate change" 212 times, suggesting they are eager to work through climate change issues on the world stage.¹⁰ Under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, African governments are set to receive \$100 billion from developed countries to address their adaption and climate mitigation needs.¹¹ However, governments have been hard-pressed to meet their own financial obligations and are moving too slowly to shift to cleaner energy and green economies.

WANTING MORE FROM EACH OTHER

Even before the pandemic, there was an emerging consensus that sub-Saharan Africa's relations with external partners were due for an overhaul. In 2017, Ghanaian president Nana Akufo-Addo thundered that "we can no longer continue to make policy for ourselves in our continent on the basis of whatever support that the Western world can give us."¹² Several foreign partners, from the United States to China, Russia, and India, pledged to increase engagement and break from past practices. Even the small island country Malta vowed to be different; its representative to the African Union proclaimed its policy could no longer be about selling Twisteas, an iconic Maltese snack. He stated that it was essential "to take a different view, and engage, and Malta should be there, changing the way Europe speaks about Africa, and speaking about SMEs [small and medium-size enterprises], both for Africa and for Malta."¹³

Since the Covid-19 outbreak, however, African leaders and publics have sharpened their critiques of and insisted on much more from their foreign partnerships. The region's governments have tapped into public frustration about the virus's foreign origins, the shallowness of the international

response, and overbearing public health guidance from countries that are failing to curb their own outbreaks.

- Ivorian president Alassane Ouattara judged that "there's been a selfishness on the part of industrialized nations for decades."¹⁴ Ghanaian finance minister Ken Ofori-Atta, in an op-ed for the *Financial Times* in April, raged against the "unbalanced nature of the global architecture."¹⁵
- Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed insisted that life-and-death supplies—including personal protective equipment (PPE), testing kits, and ventilators—be fairly distributed, "not hoarded by the rich and few."¹⁶ WHO Africa director Matshidiso Moeti reminded international partners that "we first, not me first, is the only way to end the pandemic."¹⁷
- Kenyan cabinet secretary for health Mutahi Kagwe called for African agency and self-sufficiency during Covid-19, especially amid the scramble for vaccines. Kagwe told journalists, "it's very important to come to the realization that depending on the Western nations for our well-being as far as medical issues are concerned is foolish."¹⁸

Foreign governments have tried to respond, at times falling over themselves to prove that they are more responsive than their geopolitical rivals. At least 24 countries have provided medical supplies and financial assistance to sub-Saharan Africa between March and December 2020.¹⁹

- The United States wasted little time in reassuring counterparts it is "by far the largest donor" and that American expertise, generosity, and planning are "unmatched in history."²⁰ Chinese president Xi Jinping committed to give \$2 billion to the WHO over the next two years and reminded Africa that its medical assistance has helped treat 200 million Africans over the past seven decades.²¹
- Brazil, India, Japan, and others have stepped up their humanitarian assistance, chiefly in response to damage caused by Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in southeast Africa in 2019. India sent warships to Mozambique and Madagascar, prompting the Malagasy foreign minister to call New Delhi "a true friend who is always there during the time of need."²²

BUT PRIORITIES ARE NOT ENTIRELY ALIGNED

The tension between what Africans, African governments, and external partners want from one another acts as a brake on a post-Covid-19 reset. It may not be possible

to reconcile these different agendas, but understanding and acknowledging these disagreements and trade-offs between priorities are prerequisites for a new relationship.

African publics have the most varied views about external partners. In a recent Afrobarometer poll, 32 percent of Africans surveyed in 18 countries viewed the United States as a model, 23 percent admired China's system, and only 11 percent sought to emulate a former colonial power.²³

- African publics in general have been incensed about the treatment of their fellow citizens and the diaspora abroad. Africans have unloaded on social media over incidents in Guangzhou and the death of Black Americans at the hands of U.S. police. There have been violent outbreaks over Chinese hiring practices and involvement in illicit fishing, mining, and wildlife trafficking as well as xenophobic attacks on UN peacekeepers and foreign businesses.²⁴
- Africans range widely on the role of foreign powers in their respective country's political, military, and economic affairs; some individuals decry how external powers prop up autocratic leaders in exchange for security partnerships, while others deplore how foreign governments impose what they say are "non-African" values—such as LGBTQ+ rights—on their communities.²⁵ In Francophone countries, many publics have bristled at the close political and economic links between French and African elites, known as *Françafrique*, as well as the extensive network of military bases through West and Central Africa.²⁶
- There is deep appreciation for foreign investments in health and development, although scholars have shown there is some frustration about the prioritization, design, and implementation of these programs. Political scientist Kim Yi Dionne, for instance, notes that "while the international community highly prioritizes AIDS, ordinary Africans give relatively lower priority to AIDS." She argues that it is critical to increase foreign awareness about the issues citizens in Africa actually value.²⁷

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Since the era of African independence, most regional leaders have been nimble in their positions toward international partners, navigating their personal and political goals, the demands of their citizens, and the realities of international affairs. While leaders have shown uncommon piques of anger during the past year, most have shifted in rhetoric rather than in substance. The pandemic's crushing blow to their economies and unsettled political and security dynamics have privileged caution over catharsis.

- African leaders recognize that they need to work with Beijing, Washington, and other foreign capitals to secure debt relief and foreign funds, as well as medical supplies to fight the pandemic's deleterious effects. Despite distress over the incidents in Guangzhou, most of the region's presidents and prime ministers left the dirty work of complaining to the diplomats.²⁸ Similarly, Sahelian leaders have tried to work with Paris to manage anti-French sentiment over military operations. Ivorian president Ouattara brokered a deal on the West African CFA franc, which is tied to the euro.²⁹ Most leaders presumably believe the cost of a radical rebalancing is too high.
- African heads of state and government also are mindful that foreign partnerships play into the hands of their domestic opponents. China has become a political cudgel in several countries. In Nigeria, opposition lawmakers have demanded a review of Chinese loans and in-country Chinese laborers to undercut the ruling party.³⁰ In Ghana, former president John Mahama slammed the government for setting free a wealthy Chinese national involved in illicit mining.³¹ Civil society similarly has been quick to take leaders to task for acceding to U.S. requests to resettle Guantanamo Bay detainees or the signing of corrupt energy deals with Russia.³²

Africa's international partners have their own constraints, enmeshed in Covid-19 and political crises at home and predisposed to prioritize specific countries and issue sets. While President Biden has promised a change in U.S. foreign policy, the world has become more adversarial and less reflexively multilateral in approaches to sub-Saharan Africa during the past four years.

- The United States, United Kingdom, France, India, Japan, and other countries are dedicating resources, time, and attention to manage the pandemic's health and economic effects at home. While all have donated generously to the continent, governments have tended

to act in their self-interest with regard to vaccine distribution, and economic assistance packages have their limits. China, while it has continued its trade and projects, appears to have significantly curtailed its lending to the region.³³

- Africa's foreign partners often find themselves making difficult trade-offs between national security interests, development objectives, and democratic values. The United States in the past has backed Chad, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda—all of which have horrible human rights records—because those governments have been key security partners or reliable managers of development projects. While the instinct is to partner with democracies or countries most in need, it has been harder in practice to consistently meet that goal.
- The Trump administration's elevation of geopolitical competition with Beijing and Moscow in sub-Saharan Africa is another factor, requiring U.S. officials to counter Russian mercenaries in Central African Republic or hype road deals in Kenya as an alternative to a Chinese railroad.³⁴ This competitive impulse, also adopted by some of the region's European partners, has informed U.S. opposition to special drawing rights at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and possibly to blocking Okonjo-Iweala at the WTO.³⁵ It has also made multilateral commitments—including UN and AU peacekeeping missions or support of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement—less of a priority.

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BUILDING POST-COVID-19 PARTNERSHIPS

Even with these tensions, there is a series of practical steps to remake Africa's post-Covid-19 relations with external partners. First, there is the easy task of treating each other with more dignity and mutual respect. External powers also should recommit to

multilateralism and agree to lower the temperature of geopolitical competition. Second, there is the more difficult undertaking to dismantle preexisting barriers to economic growth, including debt and illiquidity, and ramp up investment in key sectors. Finally, African governments and their foreign counterparts will have to accept the hardest missions: confronting longstanding weaknesses in their democracies, reconsidering decades-old security partnerships, and incurring some near-term costs to address the climate change challenge.

Beginning in August 2020, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) convened current and former African, European, Indian, Japanese, and U.S. officials, as well as academics, researchers, and investors, to identify concrete recommendations to reset Africans' post-Covid-19 relations.

START WITH THE EASY STUFF

Sub-Saharan Africa's foreign counterparts must discard the paternalistic, holier-than-thou approach to bilateral relations. There has to be a genuine partnership, treating each other as sovereign nations. A revitalized relationship must prioritize engagement with African counterparts because there are strategic issues on the table, not just because foreign policymakers favor specific leaders or pet issues. It is also necessary for foreign governments to tackle structural racism and prejudice in their own societies before expecting ties with African counterparts to reflect genuine mutual respect.

- **Elevate diplomatic engagement.** Africa's foreign counterparts tend to visit the region infrequently and only periodically invite African leaders to the capital. It is not uncommon for a foreign minister to be relegated to a meeting with a lower-level counterpart, such as the assistant secretary of state for African affairs. A concerted effort to elevate these engagements is a first step. Beijing tends to perform better than its rivals on this score, always sending its foreign minister to the region at the beginning of the new year.³⁶
- **Defend universal rights.** Africans and African diaspora communities have faced the brunt of police brutality, racial discrimination, and atrocious working conditions abroad, especially in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.³⁷ European governments have struggled to manage migrant camps and curb rising xenophobia in their countries. The United States—until President Biden's inauguration—imposed travel bans on Eritreans, Nigerians, Somalis, Sudanese, and Tanzanians and

attempted to curtail the granting of student visas. Africa's foreign partners should publicly acknowledge these injustices, punish perpetrators, and dismantle discriminatory policies to reset relations.

It is time to return to multilateralism and partnerships, ditching the Trump administration's "America First" approach and penalizing countries that work with its adversaries. If the region and its foreign partners want to rebuild following the pandemic's devastation, it is imperative to foster collaboration and walk away from the zero-sum approach to foreign relations. President Biden has set the right tone, rejoining the WHO on day one, and his administration has an opportunity to join other foreign governments in deepening its support of the AfCFTA. It is also essential to mull how to evolve beyond the standard African summit format.

- **Welcome multilateralism.** African governments are strong proponents of multilateralism, and many blanched at the Trump administration's withdrawal from the WHO and Paris Climate Agreement as well as its hostility to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Trump's pressure to cut peacekeeping missions and his former secretary of state's snubbing of AU chair Faki did not sit well with most Africans.³⁸ Since most of the region's counterparts remain committed multilateralists, there is an opening for more robust engagement and collaboration to strengthen African voices within these bodies.
- **Reframe global competition.** While geopolitical competition is likely to remain, Africans want partners to smooth out its edges to allow for some collaboration. As AfDB president Adesina has explained: "I don't see a competition at all, I see complementarity."³⁹ In his confirmation hearing, Biden's secretary of state Tony Blinken said "there are rising adversarial aspects of the relationship [with China]; certainly, competitive ones, and still some cooperative ones, when it is in our mutual interests."⁴⁰ The region's leaders and foreign partners should agree on shared principles of transparency, accountability, and standards to forestall malign behavior.
- **Stand with the AfCFTA.** The AfCFTA, which came into force at the beginning of 2021, is a gamechanger for the region's economies. It has the potential to unite a market of more than 1.2 billion people and would have a combined GDP of more than \$3.4 trillion, which would be the fifth-largest economy in the world, larger than India's nominal GDP.⁴¹

While many foreign governments have signaled their support, there is more work to be done. Beijing and Washington need to explain how the Chinese free trade agreement (FTA) with Mauritius and forthcoming U.S. FTA with Kenya will complement the AfCFTA.⁴² Africa's foreign governments also should consider embedding personnel in the AfCFTA's secretariat in Accra.

- **Promote next-level summitry.** While African governments generally welcome the wave of summits between the region and foreign partners, there is a desire for additional forums to complement the Africa +1 format.⁴³ There should be more experimentation with trilateral arrangements to deepen cooperation on transnational challenges such as piracy, wildlife trafficking, and terrorism. Africans and their partners should also consider alternative settings to address core issues.⁴⁴ For instance, Africans and their partners could borrow from the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (also known as the Quad) to promote a dialogue between the United States, African governments, and other external stakeholders on strategic threats.⁴⁵

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MOVE TO TOUGHER CHALLENGES

Sub-Saharan Africa's external partners will have to take on more nettlesome issues and realign their investment priorities to establish more productive post-Covid-19 relationships. Specifically, there is an urgent need to address the region's debt crisis. As Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni lectured in May 2020, the region's "external friends, if they are friends at all, should cancel all the multilateral and bilateral loans."⁴⁶ In addition, African counterparts should pivot to focus on health, technology, and urbanization programming.

The region is in debt distress, hobbling governments' ability to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) program, according to Brookings Institution's Homi Kharas and Meagan Dooley, "falls well short" of what developing countries owe.⁴⁷ If the foreign governments and the international financial institutions want to start a new relationship, they need to—as the ONE Campaign says—"rip up the rulebook."⁴⁸

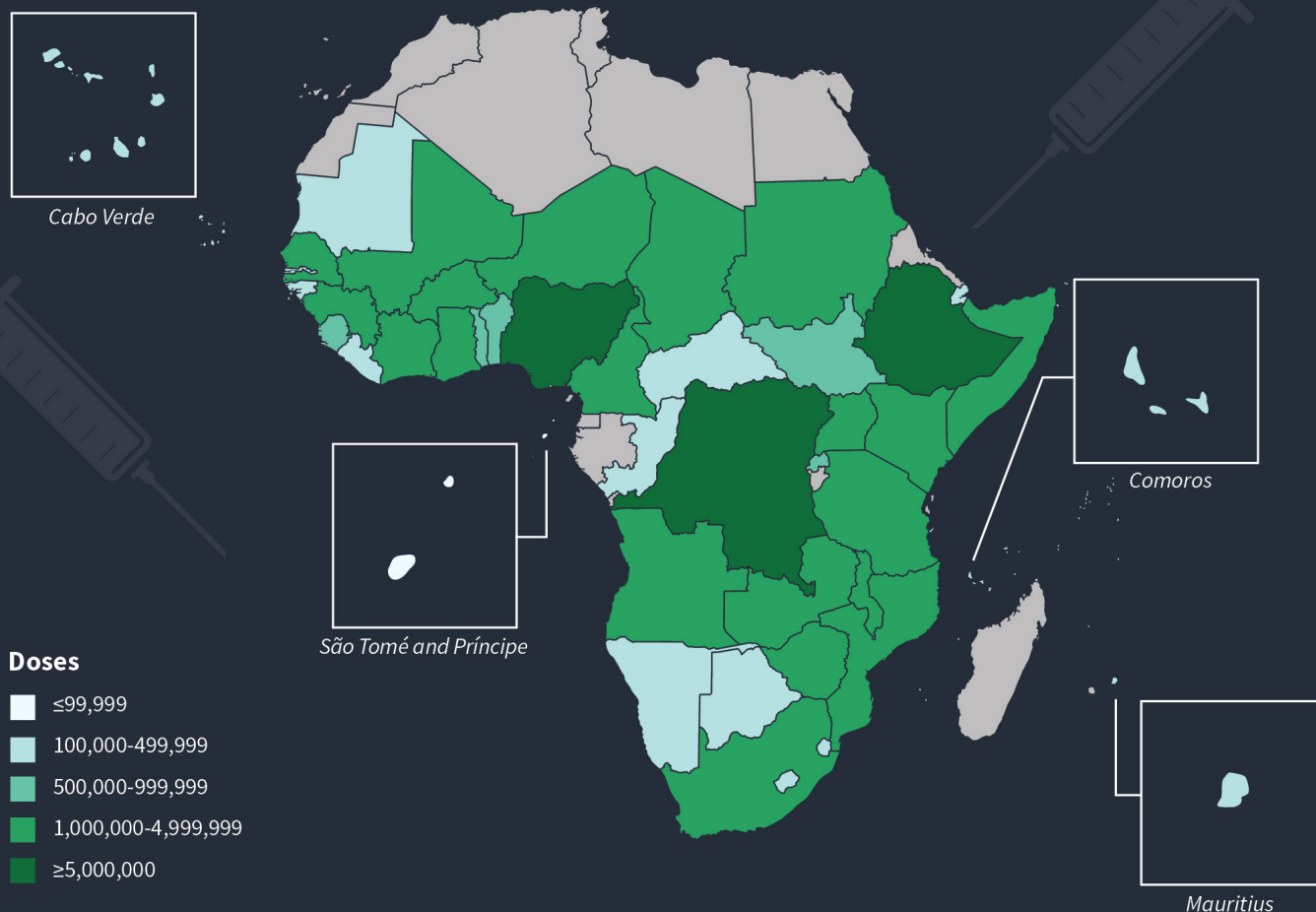
- **Lean forward on debt relief.** The DSSI program has been unequal to the task. Carlos Lopes, the AU Commission's high representative for relations with

the European Union, told the Africa Report that "the first package was a joke, and now it's a joke plus." He added that the international community is doing the bare minimum.⁴⁹ The ONE Campaign has called on bilateral, private, and multilateral creditors to immediately suspend debt repayments through at least 2021.⁵⁰ Outgoing Nigerien president Mahamadou Issoufou has gone further, insisting in June 2020 on a "Marshall Plan" for Africa and asking for an increase in public aid from the region's partners.⁵¹

- **Address liquidity and credit scores.** It is important to respond to the liquidity crisis across the region. In

VACCINES PROMISED TO SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA UNDER COVAX

The COVAX mechanism is designed to provide equitable vaccine distribution to low-income countries at a reduced rate, including in sub-Saharan Africa. But COVAX has two key shortcomings: it will only have vaccines available in Africa by the end of March, and it will only vaccinate 20 percent of Africa's population, while the continent needs 60 percent to be vaccinated in order to achieve herd immunity.



Source: "The COVAX Facility: Interim Distribution Forecast," GAVI, February 3, 2021, <https://www.gavi.org/sites/default/files/covid/covax/COVAX-Interim-Distribution-Forecast.pdf>.

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October 2020, UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that “without bold measures, Africa’s liquidity challenge could spiral into a solvency crisis.”⁵² The U.S. Development Finance Corporation has established a Rapid Response Liquidity Facility to ensure banks in developing economies continue to provide loans.⁵³ African governments are equally worried about their credit rating; at a joint CSIS-ONE Campaign virtual event, Kader Hassane, senior director of the Africa50 Infrastructure Fund, advised that foreign partners prioritize debt repayment to commercial creditors to protect African governments’ standing.⁵⁴

Africa’s recovery from Covid-19 requires access to vaccines as well as a more comprehensive approach to the region’s communicable and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). The pandemic also has made clear how much the region has been transformed over recent decades, requiring policymakers and investors to shift their resources toward technology and urban areas to meet current and future needs.

- **Update health assistance.** The Covid-19 crisis has exposed the disparities between Africa and the rest of the world’s access to key medical supplies and vaccines. Former Liberian president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf noted that “we don’t have the resources . . . unless [vaccines are] seen as a free good on the basis that until everyone is safe, no one is safe.”⁵⁵ The international community will have to do more, in part because COVAX, a global initiative to develop and equitably distribute Covid-19 vaccines, does not have enough resources.⁵⁶ In addition, the region’s partners should step up on pharmaceuticals and health infrastructure and integrate oft-neglected elderly and NCD care into regional health systems.⁵⁷
- **Go big on tech.** Despite one of the world’s fastest growth rates for mobile phone subscribers, only 26 percent of the population can access the internet. The World Bank in its biannual Africa’s Pulse report underscored how important the internet has been for the region’s response to the pandemic. It is crucial that African governments and their partners redouble their focus on access and affordability of voice and data connectivity to increase opportunities in the digital economy.⁵⁸ In May 2020, the African Union issued a digital transformation strategy, and several partners, including Japan, France, and the United States, have committed to prioritize this sector.⁵⁹
- **Pivot to urban areas.** The Covid-19 outbreak has

forced policymakers to reckon with a cosmopolitan, integrated, and dynamic urban continent. The virus has spread primarily in the region’s cities, home to 40 percent of the population. With the exception of the United Kingdom, most of Africa’s foreign partners disproportionately focus on rural communities. A post-Covid-19 relationship must be premised in part on working with an urban Africa. President Biden, when he was a candidate, pledged to develop an urbanization initiative to “help African cities plan for their growth in terms of critical sectors like energy access, climate change adaptation, transportation, and water management.”⁶⁰

FINISH WITH THE HARDEST TASKS

Sub-Saharan Africa’s external counterparts have to break with past practices, standing up for democracy and human rights even when doing so presents short-term consequences. While a values-based approach may exasperate current leaders and complicate some national security goals, expediency serves neither the interests of African citizens nor the long-term goals of Africa’s foreign partners. In addition, everyone must make sacrifices and incur short-term economic losses to address climate change.

While democracy is in short supply in the region, there is high demand for inclusive and accountable government. This partly explains the dramatic uptick in protests; sub-Saharan Africa saw the largest increases in antigovernment demonstrations in the world, with annual protests increasing by 23.8 percent each year between 2009 and 2019—more than twice the global average of 11.5 percent.⁶¹ It led to the downfall of authoritarian governments in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Sudan. This groundswell affirms that Africa’s foreign partners should stop turning a blind eye and bankrolling autocrats they see as security and counterterrorism partners.

- **Levy penalties.** When the leaders of Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, and Uganda run for extraconstitutional terms, arrest opponents, or condone human rights abuses by their security services, Africa’s foreign partners should do more than just issue strongly worded statements.⁶² It is vital to intercede, sanctioning individuals and foreign firms directly or indirectly responsible for undermining a country’s democracy and denying citizens their universal rights.

- **Rebuild a community.** Africa's foreign partners should support prodemocracy movements and include African champions in global conversations about the state of democracy and human rights. President Biden's pledged Summit for Democracy is a tantalizing opportunity, and the organizers should invite tech savvy activists, including Nigerians behind the #EndSARS movement, opposition leaders in Tanzania, and Zimbabweans fighting state-sanctioned repression.
- **Invite hard conversations.** Africa's external interlocutors should engage the region in an honest and candid dialogue about polarized politics and persistent racial inequality within the United States as well as in European, Middle Eastern, and East Asian communities. Foreign diplomats need to solicit and listen to African opinions on positive and negative developments around the world, such as xenophobia in Europe and the crackdown on protesters in Hong Kong.

The security challenges across the region have resulted in untold tragedies and loss of human life. Africa's foreign partners, however, have either too often stuck with the same course of action or precipitously withdrawn security presence, as was the case in Somalia under President Trump. In January 2020, Senegalese president Macky Sall warned that "it would be a mistake, and it would be very misunderstood by Africans . . . because instead of coming to help, you wish to remove the little help there is."⁶³ It is imperative to rethink the key assumptions underpinning current strategies and reassess close partnership with abusive and antidemocratic governments that seek to trade on their reputations as committed counterterrorism forces.

- **Prioritize governance.** In the Sahel, the region's foreign partners have operated under the theory that removing or beating back a terrorist threat will provide governments the "time and space" to root out corruption, reengage their publics, and strengthen their democracies. As a strategy, however, it has rarely been proven, and countering terrorism does not automatically translate into more inclusive governance. It is incumbent to work with governments where there is genuine political will to solve a country's deep-seated structural issues.
- **Call bluffs.** Authoritarian regimes, such as Uganda and Cameroon, have used the counterterrorism priorities or the threat of pulling out troops from troubled spots to extract concessions and quiet criticisms of antidemocratic activities at home. Cameroonian

president Paul Biya uses the counterterrorism fight against Boko Haram in its far northern regions to deflect attention from secessionist conflict in the Anglophone areas.⁶⁴ In 2016, Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni—prior to his presidential election—claimed he would withdraw his soldiers from Somalia to incite panic in Western capitals.⁶⁵

- **Support UN peacekeeping finance.** The African Union and its member states have long pressed for UN-assessed contributions to ensure sustainable and predictable financing for AU peace support operations. While notionally supported by most of the region's partners, there are hang-ups over cost-sharing and human rights obligations.⁶⁶ The Trump administration was particularly resistant to the concept, breaking from Obama's receptivity to the idea. In a post-Covid-19 world, African governments and international counterparts should reraise this important reform.

Sub-Saharan African governments are unnerved by the impacts of climate change on their economies and livelihoods, as well as its potential to contribute to insecurity. While African countries are some of the most vulnerable to impacts of extreme weather, they are among the least prepared and will require external assistance to adapt to this existential challenge.⁶⁷

- **Grow green economies.** In 2020, the World Bank committed to help sub-Saharan African economies achieve low-carbon and climate-resilient outcomes, focusing on food security, clean energy, green and resilient cities, environmental stability, and climate shocks.⁶⁸ Katie Auth, policy director at the Energy for Growth Hub, says the U.S. government's Power Africa initiative should focus on building diversified energy sectors to adapt to climate change and to end energy poverty.⁶⁹
- **Assist on adaptation.** The World Meteorological Organization, a specialized UN agency, assessed that African governments have limited human and financial resources, as well as competing priorities, to generate and implement fully integrated climate policies and strategies.⁷⁰ African governments and their foreign partners should consider nascent proposals for debt-for-climate swaps to provide space for economic recovery and climate adaption, learning from recent deals such as the debt restructuring agreement between the Seychelles and the Nature Conservancy.⁷¹ ■

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