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COVID-19 IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING, SECURITY, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The year 2020 ushered in a global health crisis whose deleterious ramifications continue to be experienced by humankind. Its impact was and continue to be felt in all social spheres of human endeavour particularly education. In the African context, social instability due to wars, political turmoil hunger and diseases have negatively impacted on teaching and learning. This, in addition to the ravages of the pandemic. The higher education sector and societies at large, have not been spared either. Using a desktop approach, this paper attempted to highlight the real and perceived impact of COVID-19 on teaching learning, security, peace and development in an African context and the implications for African higher education thereof. It uses published literature on the subject matter including credible websites. The paper avers that the education provision needs to be provided in an atmosphere devoid of such pandemics lest teaching and learning, security, peace and education development consequentially suffer. Moreover, any discussion on the COVID-19 pandemic that is devoid of an education impact analysis is a disservice to efforts to improve teaching and learning especially in African higher education. The paper proposes a holistic approach that takes cognizant of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially on the education and food provisions. This is possible if the legislative framework and international cooperation are strengthened since education thrives in a peaceful and secure environment.

Keywords: COVID-19, teaching and learning, gender, higher education, Africa, peace and security.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are processes of imparting knowledge, skills and competencies to a nation. Broadly, the processes occur under the armpit of education. The goal of teaching and learning is to transform the mental, physical, and affective disposition of the clientele. Such processes are daunting especially if the contextual factors are unfavourable. External factors for instance, have the greatest impact. In the African context, social instability due to wars, political turmoil hunger and diseases have negatively impacted on teaching and learning. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic for instance, largely stalled teaching and learning. It caused the disruption of teaching and learning activities. Hence, Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) rightfully argued that COVID-19 was the largest disruptor of education systems by affecting over a billion learners across nations.

Marongwe and Garidzirai (2021) have detailed how the pandemic has ravaged remote located and poorly resourced South African universities and the attendant challenges of remote learning. Elsewhere in Africa, such disruptions are worsened by incidences of wars and hunger. Hence the call to provide peace and security in such contexts.

The year 2020 ushered in a global health crisis whose deleterious ramifications continue to be experienced by humankind. The crisis came in form of the COVID-19 pandemic whose origin has been traced to Wuhan in China. The COVID-19, scientifically known as the novel Coronavirus (SARS-Cov-19) was initially detected a laboratory in China in December 2019 (Fan, Si & Zhang 2020; Gronvall 2020; Oriola & Knight 2020; Renzaho 2020). The disease quickly spread across the world causing millions of deaths in its wake. The infection rates as of mid-May 2022 were 520 million with just over 6.2 million deaths (WHO 2022). The recovery rate is just over 90% and this has been enhanced by the massive global vaccine rollout in many countries including “drastic non-pharmaceutical strategies to deal with the pandemic” (Nhamo, Chikodzi, Kunene & Mashula 2021; Fan, Si & Zhang 2020). Despite these noble strategies, Covid-19 continues to cause social, economic and political challenges particularly among African countries. Such challenges are a threat to education, security, peace and development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Africa, social instability due to wars, political turmoil hunger and diseases have compounded the woes of teaching and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally stalled teaching and learning through disrupting teaching and learning. Marongwe and Garidzirai (2021) and Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) highlighted that COVID-19 disrupted most education systems by affecting countless learners across nations. In Africa, such disruptions are worsened by incidences of endless wars and recurring hunger and agitation for change by an anticipatory youth. But the ideals for a better Africa may not be realised in the absence of peace and tranquility.

Rothschild (1995) citing the then Czech leader Vaclav Havel views security as “sovereignty of the human being”. The author continues to state that the United Nations Development Programme declaration of 1994 view security as “...safety from such chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression... as well as from sudden and hurtful disruption”. This notion of security is a departure from the then narrow militaristic view (Ullman 1983) that tended to perceive security as the absence of war or the assurance of peace by the military. Baldwin (1997) opines that security is the “preservation of acquired values”. These are, ostensibly, human values. Hence security must be viewed as a prevailing socio-economic condition that assures the preservation of values such as peace, tranquility, the sanctity of life and human dignity. Security is thus synonymous with peace.

Regarding peace, an earlier definition by Galtung (1969) viewed it as “the absence of violence... the harmony of interests ...and... action against violence”. Security and peace are interwoven. Both are possible in the absence of violence since they ensure tranquility. Regrettably, COVID-19 ushered a new form of violence on humankind, that of decimating it, and disproportionately so. Women, for instance, tend to be disproportionately affected in times of crises such as COVID-19 pandemic (Osland, Røysamb & Nortvedt 2020). Such effects affect African development and

manifest in the socio-economic spheres. Regarding development, I take Walter Rodney's view that it is a multisided construct. Rodney (1972) views development as capacity, freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. As an economic and social term, he sees development as the independent capacity of humans to extract from the environment during respective historical epochs. Whatever is extracted should be for the advancement of peace, security and development. Education is critical in ensuring these ideals.

Socio-economic impact of COVID-19

The global impact of COVID-19 on society has been articulated in several studies (Chiwona-Karltun *et al* 2021; Eggar *et al* 2021; Nhamo, Chikodzi, Kunene & Mashula 2021; Fan, Si & Zhang 2020; Fleetwood 2020; Gronvall 2020; Jaidi 2020; Oriola & Knight 2020). Several studies have attempted to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on education (Almonacid-Fierro, Vargas-Vitoria, De Carvalho & Fierro, 2021; Arora, & Srinivasan, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Much of the reported impact dwells on the negative implications on countries since most of them were caught unprepared or underprepared by the ravaging pandemic. The general demand and supply, global supply chain, international trade, energy sectors, agriculture, travelling/aviation and manufacturing services received knocks in the wake of COVID-19. Activities in most of these sectors were put on hold for close to 10 months in 2020, significantly affecting nations' economics vis-a-vis global economy. The World bank reportedly predicted a 2.2% global shrink in the Gross Domestic Product (Alam 2020). Relations between and among nations (Jaidi 2020) were revised with view to create stronger synergies. Geopolitical alliances emerged in the wake of the ravages of COVID-19. "Vaccine nationalism" (Bollyky & Bown 2020; Chohan 2021) is a by-word coined to illustrate the extent to which nations went, and are willing to go, in protecting their populace against COVID-19 by allocating them vaccines first, before considering other nations.

Vaccine nationalism has presented it fair share of challenges. The net effect has been the shortage of vaccines in poor African and few middle-income countries with no capacity to produce or purchase efficacious vaccines. Bollyky and Bown (2020) have listed several real and potential challenges. These include locking access to vaccines, lack of an enforceable and rational regime of equitably distributing vaccines globally including outbidding other nations and adverse short-term deals. Alam (2020) opines that the overreliance of a nation on another for pharmaceuticals creates a danger which he terms "wellbeing security". Most rich countries are thus, prioritizing their own people and the poor nations wait in anguish for foreign assistance. The wellbeing of African countries is thus compromised since the developed north dictates terms that are generally at variance with African aspirations. In short, balancing the health security concerns and national security concerns of some African countries becomes a tricky undertaking.

The Covid-19 is a disease. Diseases caused by organisms such as viruses present health challenges to humans (Alam 2020; Chiwona-Karltun 2021) and animals with the ensuing social and economic implications. Tettey, Ayittey and Dzuvoor (2021) assert that respiratory tract diseases such as COVID-19 manifest in humans as compromised immunity in vulnerable individuals, high morbidity, mortality as well as causing economic loss in the veterinary industry. COVID-19 data show that men, women and children alike suffer from the disease. However, fewer women than

men succumb to the disease. Unfortunately, women suffer the ‘downstream consequences’ of the pandemic. Gausman and Langer (2020) aver that women disproportionately suffer more biological, behavioural, social and systemic factors than men. Pregnant women for instance, are reportedly more susceptible and vulnerable during pandemics. They are easily infected by infectious diseases and might miss antenatal appointments due to health restrictions. Of late, pregnant women are not included in Covid-19 vaccine inoculation or trials on controversial health grounds (Ayhan, Oluklu, Atalay, Beser, Tanacan, Tekin & Sahin 2021).

Other than health related aspects, economic sectors such as tourism, retail, supply chain, trade, manufacturing, stock employment, exchanges have been negatively affected (Alam 2020; Tettey, Ayithey & Dzuvor 2021). Many economic entities in Africa shut causing massive unemployment and subsequent falls in the standard of living due to dwindling income (Egger *et al* 2021). Unemployment has been accompanied by a gradual fall in peoples’ standard of living during the covid era (Egger *et al* 2021). This is more pronounced in the low to medium income countries, especially in Africa.

Socio-political impact of COVID-19

The advent of the novel virus has seen or exposed the African continent to socio-political turmoil. Global geo-political ensembles in the east and west (Jaidi 2020) have initiated the revision of existing bilateral and multilateral agreements in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. These groupings encourage socio-political cooperation, partnerships, development, peace and security. Africa’s relations with itself and the rest of the world has come under the spotlight during the COVID-19 era. Africa does not speak with one voice and thus, remains in perpetual instability and uncertainty (Jaidi 2020). The realisation of food security by most African countries as enshrined in the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is unlikely due to inherent inequality in many areas of endeavour. Fleetwood (2020) citing the World Food Organisation (FAO) outlines four facets of food security as physical availability, economic and physical access, food utilisation and stability. Fleetwood (2020) opines that ending hunger is difficult and has been exacerbated by the pandemic due to restrictions (lockdowns) and displacements that have curtailed the flow of nutritious food to the needy.

The scourge of wars particularly in Africa has exacerbated and complicated the impact of COVID-19 (Ide 2020). The immediate impact has been on the social and political realms wherein labour displacement, shortage of food, deepening unemployment rate and loss of businesses have been apparent. Terrorism in some parts of the continent, especially Nigeria, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso and some other east and central African countries notably Libya, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo has prompted many other crises. These include internal displacement and a rising refugee population which cannot be supported due to resource shortages. The states’ ability to address the COVID-19 challenges has been compromised in most respects. Ide (2020) submits that conflict destroys infrastructure, increases mortality, exacerbates grievances and diminishes the prospects of cementing peaceful relations and a state’s ability to effectively deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence his call for nation states “to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on armed conflict risks and to develop adequate policy responses such as sanctioning

armed groups trying to exploit the pandemic” (page 5). This, according to the author, calls for health diplomacy and sustainable peace building.

COVID-19 and gender issues

The lockdown worldwide has also exposed that society is not free from disproportionate gender inequality and violence (Mittal & Singh 2020; Solórzano, Gamez & Corcho 2020), which, in the case of South Africa, resulted in many killing, brutalisation of fellow human beings (Stiegler & Bouchard 2020), among other atrocities. Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey and Tertilt (2020), John, Casey, Carino, and McGovern (2020); Reichelt, Makovi and Sargsyan (2021) submit that the COVID-19 pandemic has promoted gender inequalities especially in sectors traditionally dominated by a particular gender. Some service occupations such as schools (day care centers), hospitality and health care which generally employ more women than men were closed. This further put a strain on working and single mothers while, in some instances, ‘eroding social norms’ in childcare and household division of labour. Thus, gender roles and norms tended to be distorted (due to employment differentials and division of labour) especially in tradition-inclined societies such as those in Africa.

Employment differentials (or status) and division of labour (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey & Tertilt 2020; Renzaho 2020; Egger 2021; Reichelt, Makovi & Sargsyan 2021) are known sources of family feuds and violence ultimately. Spousal income distortions for instance came about when, either one or both husband and wife lost a job. Such scenarios especially in Africa, are a fertile source of domestic disputes especially if the woman became the sole breadwinner. In Europe where gender-role attitudes adapted to lived realities, unemployed men tended to demonstrate more egalitarian gender-role attitudes while their wives demonstrated traditional attitudes when unemployed (Reichelt, Makovi & Sargsyan 2021).

In academia, available evidence shows a decline in research productivity by female academics during the COVID-19 era (Muric, Lerman & Ferrara 2020). Women particularly married ones have multiple roles of academic, mother, wife and in some instances ‘husband’ (provider). The non-family roles (academia in this case) tend to suffer. In extreme cases, some women prefer resigning in preference to maintaining the family bond and stability.

The closure of schools during the hard lockdowns ushered millions of girls into mainstream society. Most of the affected live in least developed countries where they became prone to sexual abuse, violence, sexual exploitation, unemployment, early pregnancy and forced marriages (Muller & Nathan 2020; John, *et al* 2020). The unfortunate girls thus lost on learning as they dropped out school to take up new domestic roles in homes. Societal norms particularly in Africa prioritises boy education, undervalues girl education, burdens girls with chores thus bolstering gender gaps, gender inequality, and disempowers girls (Muller & Nathan 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a desktop approach. The desktop study researchers do not conduct a field physical investigation. Instead, they gather existing research information from the desktop to

derive meaning from the studied phenomena (Johnston, 2014). Consequently, my study adopted this approach to harness literature-based data mainly since the process is less time consuming and inexpensive than a field or physical investigation. At least forty (40) relevant studies on COVID-19 were consulted to understand the educational and social implications of the pandemic in an African higher education and socio-politico context. A massive body of literature on COVID-19 started emerging from 2019 to date. The literature covered the constructs that anchor this paper i.e., COVID-19 and its educational and socio-economic implications especially on peace and security in an African context. It is such literature that informed the author's thematic arguments outlined herein.

RESULTS

The implications on the future of African higher education

The COVID-19 pandemic has in some instances created mistrust and distrust among nations and citizens (the elite and unemployed youths). The relationship that should co-exist with the economically viable citizens has been jeopardized given the manner the governments handle the pandemic. There are allegations of the politicisation of COVID-19 information and data, and the direct and indirect responses of Governments to such issues (Peng & Chen 2021; Shumba, Nyamaruze, Nyambuya, & Meyer-Weitz 2020). Such issues are compounded by pre-existing economic, social inequalities and exclusion. Universities for their part, have instituted mechanism meant to ensure continuity of learning. Remote learning for instances was adopted despite known challenges (Marongwe & Garidzirai, 2021). These factors are fertile ground for social, structural, physical and systemic crises that dog the higher education sector for instance.

Students' agitations:

The COVID-19 debate will be incomplete if we do not highlight its impact on higher education learning. The future of universities in Africa appears uncertain as students have started to agitate for adequate funding of the universities (van Schalkwyk, 2021; Marinoni, Van't Land & Jensen 2020). We have witnessed curriculum remodification (home based and online/remote and hybrid learning), reduced funding among other pivotal issues exposed during COVID-19 era (Gronvall 2020). This has been evident in South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, among others. In South Africa for instance, students in some universities are clamouring for online assessment ostensibly as a softer route (to the podium) than the traditional sit or face to face assessment regime. This is in addition to the document challenges associated with remote learning (Marongwe & Garidzirai (2021). Thus, the effect on the future of universities and the quality of the churned graduate has implications on African security, peace and development. International collaboration among universities, in some instances, has been put on hold due to the pandemic. In such instances, the integrity and ethical clout of institutions are placed on check.

Staff unions' agitations

In some countries, staff unions are already feeling the unabated deprivations resulting from reduced education and health funding (Jacob, Abigeal & Lydia 2020) delayed salary payments, demotion, denial of promotion on COVID-19 grounds. There has been dwindling state and corporate support for higher education with the resultant decline in staff motivation and efficiency

(Tovmasyan & Minasyan 2020). Moreover, the rights of academic citizens, including international labour are not secured because of dwindling resources meant to sustain all. Universities have had to ‘think out of the box’ and proffer ways to get third stream income to sustain an agitated and resistive labour force that cannot be sustained by a burgeoning staff salary bill prompted by dwindling state support. The advent of the pandemic has constrained the states’ ability to meet all its social and financial obligations especially in the education sector.

DISCUSSION

If development is a multi-faceted construct as Rodney (1972) puts it, Africa needs a holistic and aggressive approach to win the trust of the citizens in the fight against COVID-19. Such an approach will ensure an Africa that is secure and at peace with itself; An Africa that charts its own development agenda and not one which is dictated to by the so-called powerful nations. I call for the orientation and re-orientation of the African mind. A mind that prioritises a nation’s education. An education that places a student and the worker at the center of the development agenda. In the same vein their rights and privileges should be protected including those of people from other nations (peculiar to all African countries).

Strengthening African trade and bilateral relationships will ensure economic security peace and development as well. The fight against COVID-19 requires global health diplomacy (Chattu, Pooransingh & Allahverdipour, 2021). The value of the health sector and healthy workforce is immense; Hence multisectoral and multi-level negotiations for global cooperation are needed in combating the pandemic. In our quest for a globalized world, locally relevant and culturally appropriate COVID-19 interventions (Renzaho, 2020) should be pursued. One such approach is taking gender and education issues seriously. Hence a gendered perspective that tackles sexual and reproductive health and socio-economic issues (Muller & Nathan 2020) is called for. The role of women particularly, should be enhanced through tackling retrogressive practices and norms such as gender-based violence in African societies particularly the education sector. Such approaches will ensure that women exude their inert potentialities as a group. Finally, as Gronvall (2020) suggests, part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic could come through legislation. Some countries have already begun revising statutes by for example, aligning their travel, health, trade and international cooperation protocols to existing legislation. Giving legality to fighting a pandemic is in sync with international norms and standards enshrined in the United Nation Charter.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I need to point out that we cannot isolate COVID-19 from security, peace and development. A healthy nation is secure in the absolute sense. A healthy nation guarantees its continued existence. Food secure nations are at peace with themselves. COVID-19 has brought to the fore social, economic and political iniquities and inequalities, especially in Africa. In addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, a holistic approach that takes cognizant of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially on the food provision is imperative. Strengthening the legislative framework and international cooperation will ensure security peace and development. Education thrives in a peaceful and secure environment. It is such ideal but seemingly elusive environment that Africa yearns.

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