

COVID-19 Pandemic: how we should respond

It is quite interesting to listen to a TED talk given by Bill Gates in 2015 in which he strongly stressed the fact that the next greatest human plight is neither going to be a terrorist attack nor a nuclear war but an infectious agent. He went further mentioning that the infectious agent is likely to be a novel virus that will sweep the globe. ^[1]

In December 2019, a cluster of cases of severe pneumonia were detected in the Wuhan province of China. This later turned out to be the presumed source of the COVID-19 pandemic which has spread rapidly around the world. It is worth defining the name COVID-19 which is; **CO**=Corona, **VI**=Virus, **D**=Disease, **19**=2019 which is the year in which the disease occurred first. COVID-19 is the disease and the virus which causes it is SARS-CoV-2. ^[2]

Like many other pandemics in the past, COVID-19 is being marked by death, panic and lots of uncertainties. There has also been a proliferation of different scientific theories pertaining to the mode of transmission, effective preventive measures, treatment options and herd immunity messages. All these serve as a source of social distress, which at times is aggravated by different media messages.

But what does COVID-19 mean for Africa at large and South Sudan in particular? Due to the fluid nature and contagiousness of this pandemic, it is difficult to state the extent to which individual African countries have been/will be affected and I am sure this information will be outdated within the next hour or day. However, it is important to mention that at the time of publication of this editorial (30 April, 2020), South Sudan has confirmed 35 positive cases and tested 181 samples so far according to the African CDC database. ^[3]

A number of countries neighbouring South Sudan have confirmed several cases of COVID-19. Given the epidemiological nature of the spread of COVID-19 and based on the experiences of hard-hit countries, South Sudan could be a hotbed of the pandemic given its location and the almost non-existent health care system.

Along the same line, the WHO director, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Wednesday 18th March 2020 called on all African governments to act swiftly when he said: “The best advice for Africa is to prepare for the worst and prepare today. It is not a question about if but rather when Africa will be affected.” ^[4]

What can or should we do then?

The experiences of China, Italy, the UK and South Korea showed beyond doubt that the preparation of healthcare cadres and the wider health system is of paramount importance in combating COVID-19, in addition to several preventive measures put in place. At the helm of these actions lies a political will to address the pandemic as a national priority.

In light of the information that is available at this juncture, the current message is preparedness of the health system, community education, laws to enforce social distancing and, above all testing, testing and testing.

References

1. Bill Gates. [TED 2015. The next outbreak? we are not ready.](#)
2. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. [Q and A on Covid-19](#)
3. Africa CDC. [Latest updates on the COVID-19 crisis](#)
4. WHO COVID-19 – [Virtual Press conference 18 March, 2020](#)

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