

INTEGRATED RESPONSES TO BUILDING CLIMATE AND PANDEMIC RESILIENCE IN AFRICA

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The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest challenge the world has faced since the Second World War. While it began as a health crisis, it has far reaching economic ramifications. For Africa the pandemic’s impacts will be particularly severe – by exacting a heavy human toll, upending livelihoods and damaging business and government balance sheets, the crisis threatens to slow down the region’s growth prospects for years to come. According to the World Bank the pandemic has set off the first recession in the Sub-Saharan Africa region in 25 years.

At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis is colliding with the continent’s existing climate crisis. Changes in precipitation levels, increase in temperature extremes and rising sea levels are already having a wide range of direct and indirect impacts on Africa and it’s the poorest and most vulnerable that are suffering the most. The pandemic has already hit communities reeling from the worst locust outbreak in 70 years, record high water levels in Lake Victoria and floods in the Democratic Republic of Congo - a combination of disasters all linked to climate change.

Across the Continent, leaders in the public, private, and development sectors are taking decisive action—both to save lives and to protect households, businesses, and national economies. Several African countries have already moved to stabilize fiscal pressures through cancelling, postponing, and redirecting all non-essential expenses. But the risk is these short-term emergency measures may unintentionally damage ongoing climate adaptation measures across the highly climate-exposed sectors of food security; water; and infrastructure.

The international community has also moved swiftly to support African countries in responding to the COVID-19 crisis but the \$57 billion announced so far for 2020 is not enough to offset the estimated over \$100 billion that African countries will need immediately to respond just to this crisis and finance a health and social safety net response, let alone make up for expected losses in GDP that may approach an estimated \$400 billion over 2020-2021 alone. Meanwhile Africa continues to face the same challenges it has always done including our climate emergency. There must be an integrated response to both crises so recovery programs can propel Africa towards increased resilience.

To that effect, the African Adaptation Initiative (AAI) and the Global Center on Adaptation (GCA) have prepared a dedicated policy brief. We recommend focusing stimulus investment on resilient infrastructure and food security to overcome the COVID-climate crisis. We propose a set of policy recommendations that bring multiple benefits, a “triple dividend”, to African countries. The first dividend is reduced pandemic risk. The second is climate resilience and the third is strengthened economic recovery. Many adaptation actions also generate significant additional economic, societal and environmental benefits, which accrue on an ongoing basis starting at the time of investment and are not dependent on the future state of the climate.