



NEWSLETTER

SPECIAL EDITION

**AFRICAN RESPONSES TO THE
COVID-19 HEALTH CRISIS AND
THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS**
(VOL 2)



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Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-AFRICA)

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Editorial

Trade Unions and the new normal in the world of work

This is the second issue of ITUC-Africa's Special Edition Newsletter on COVID-19. As in the first issue, the focus once again is on individual African country responses to the crisis and the trade union role thereof. We also provide some information on effects on migrant and domestic workers as well as gender violence that has taken place during this period.

The rising figures on infections suggest that the pandemic has not yet reached its peak in Africa. Since 30th April, 2020, when the 1st issue of this Newsletter came out, there recorded cases of COVID-19 across Africa has risen by over 200 per cent from 37,402 confirmed cases to 135,373. The number of recoveries has also increased from 12,248 to 56,401 while the death rate has more than doubled from 1,598 to some 3,923.

We recall that when the coronavirus

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initially entered Africa, many African governments and the African Union responded urgently with drastic measures involving restrictions and lockdowns. They appear to have done so by taking into account the appropriate lessons from the successes and shortfalls of countries which had responded earlier to the virus in Asia, Europe and the Americas.

So far, the measures implemented to contain the spread and treat those who got infected in Africa seem to have worked. Africans on the continent have not experienced the heavy number of deaths that some, including the WHO, predicted. On the other hand, people of African descent in the diaspora in the USA, Brazil and Europe appear to have suffered heavily in disproportionate terms to their numbers in those locations. The impact of the coronavirus on livelihoods of the majority of African peoples has, however, been devastating. The scale of economic disruptions and social distress have been staggering. As the virus continues to spread, even more livelihoods are threatened.

Lessons from the national responses

In the national responses to the crisis of COVID-19 across the world a number of important lessons have emerged for those who care to learn. The first major lesson is that as countries closed their borders, and in some cases restricted exports of essential products, people across the world were suddenly thrown the challenge of catering for their essential needs. Thus, while we appeared to be facing the same storm, countries and peoples around the world were in different boats coping with it. Closed borders meant cuts in food supplies for some and the shortage of essential medical supplies

for others.

A second lesson was that as rich countries dug into their reserves to support emergency measures for fighting the coronavirus, Africa and other poor countries around the world could not do the same. Most African states and developing countries of the world had to run to the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and some industrialized countries to seek debt relief, grants and concessional loans to be able to address the heavy fiscal demands that COVID-19 has imposed on their economies.

A third lesson from COVID-19 has been lack of in-country preparedness for emergencies. This unpreparedness is reflected in and exacerbated by, the fragility and weakness of health systems and infrastructure across Africa, poor sanitation, tenuous water and electricity supply systems, the urban overcrowding, the near absence of social protection, the huge informality and massive numbers of the unemployed. These conditions made it especially difficult for countries to implement the restrictions and lockdowns that were considered essential for containing the virus and preventing it from spreading uncontrollably.

Strikingly also, COVID-19 laid bare the deep inequities embedded in our economic and social lives on the continent. On one hand, Africa's upper and middle classes could either stay home on their savings or work from home in response to lockdown or stay home restrictions implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19. On the other hand, the majority of workers and their families with meagre or no savings were threatened by poverty and starvation. Many lost their jobs and incomes as well as livelihoods. Workers in the informal economy

lacking sufficient savings and social safety nets and who live from day to day were hardest hit. Many such workers faced destitution and had to cope with insufficient supplies and handouts in order to cope with the drastic measures of containment. Again, African migrant workers, particularly domestic workers in the Middle East, agricultural and domestic workers in Italy and elsewhere in Europe as well as others in Asia, especially China, have suffered abuses and discrimination during this crisis.

Another critical lesson is the clarity that has been provided on who really are frontline workers as well as essential workers and service providers. As restrictions and lockdowns got imposed, those who clearly emerged as the frontline workers were the healthcare and medical professionals as well as scientists who had to take care of those infected and deal with conditions relating directly to the threat posed by the new coronavirus. The essential workers were those whose work became necessary for minimal survival and the ability of nations to meet the existential threat that faced them and their populations. These were the caregivers, food producers and distributors, water and other utility workers, producers of health and medical products, cleaners and other sanitary workers, retailers, transporters, security personnel, media workers and policy makers. During the grim period in the last few months when most parts of the world virtually had to close down to contain the spread of the virus, the essential workers turned out to be key in supporting the heroes and heroines in the frontline of fighting the coronavirus and its threat to wipe out populations.

Africa and it's resilience

Notwithstanding the poor state of preparedness in which the pandemic found us, many African governments and their people appear to have demonstrated considerable resilience in combatting COVID-19. On the part of trade unions, a good number of them have responded robustly to defend and protect workers. This has especially been with regards to promoting occupational safety and health at work, including securing personal protective equipment and materials for workers. Unions have also been active in advocating for and instituting measures to mitigate the impacts of the crisis on workers and their families.

As we approach the third month since the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 a global pandemic, the world appears to be gradually moving towards relaxing the measures that were initially introduced to contain the coronavirus and prevent its spread. The necessity to balance public health needs with economic production and social reproduction is pushing countries to lift restrictions even though it is clear COVID-19 is still around and continues to pose a threat to populations.

New Normal

The lifting of restrictions and the return to work when the coronavirus is still present clearly means that the world cannot simply return to the old way of doing things. The world is simply confronted with the situation of a new normal. Life and work must go on side by side with the coronavirus. Knowledge of the virus, however, grows and we learn better by the day how to fight it and live on.

We need to reflect intensely on the lessons learnt in the last few months. In particular, COVID-19 has exposed our socio-economic weaknesses in Africa and has impacted on workers and their families in the most negative manner. That should in turn raise the need for us to work to address the consequent challenges

the consequent challenges

- to achieve food security and self reliance in the provision of essential goods like primary medical supplies;
- to pursue social protection for all;
- to commit attention to employment creation and provision of living incomes; and above all
- to institutionalize social dialogue and inclusion as the means for pursuing these goals.

As the world begins to open up and to return to work, African trade unions are reminded that there are already existing frameworks of the African Union (AU) as well as international instruments and labour standards that can be used effectively to advance the rights and interests of African workers. The AU Agenda 2063: The Africa we want and the recently adopted African Free Trade Continental Area (AfCFTA), provide realistic frames for African countries to work together. This has been reinforced since COVID-19 by the African Center for Disease Control, which seems to have done well in coordinating African responses to the global pandemic. African trade unions must do their bit in pushing for the realization of the African agenda for regional cooperation and integration.

At national level, as countries prepare to relax restrictions and open

up, trade unions must unite at home and demand social dialogue with employers and governments to discuss the conditions and measures for going back to work. These measures must be in conformity with international labour standards. They can ensure that as our countries cope further with COVID-19 and the devastation it has wreaked on economies and livelihoods, we begin to take the steps towards establishing a new social contract between our states and the people.

In this connection, social dialogue must seek to establish clear principles for recovery and reconstruction from the crisis and seek to pursue policies and enact measures that create and protect jobs, incomes and workers' rights. Such dialogue can also frame and provide information on clear and transparent guidelines on funding for supporting businesses and workers. Unions will do well to ensure that social dialogue also provides the avenue for workers to engage in collective bargaining about their terms and conditions of service and for informal economy workers to secure representation in decision making on issues that affect them.

At the workplace itself, full use must be made of occupational safety and health (OSH) committees. Such committees should be empowered to discuss with employers core principles of safety and health at work. They should also be used to undertake risk assessments at work and to decide measures of risk mitigation and prevention as well as protective measures and equipment.

Furthermore, to enhance safety in the world of work, unions can press for and contribute to the creation of information hubs or centers where workers can get or feed relevant information on

what is happening within their workplaces or communities.

Finally, as emphasized by the ILO, the world of work can benefit from joint training sessions by unions and employers on provisions of OSH, COVID-19 transmission and risk covering the following topics:

- How COVID-19 is transmitted at the workplace and in the community
- Safety and health mitigation measures including physical distancing
- Information, signage and personal protective materials
- Hygiene and disinfection
- Emergency procedures.

Recent ILO Recommendation 202 on Social Protection Floors, Recommendation 204 on Formalizing the Informal Economy and Recommendation 205 on Peace and Resilience, are all useful sources of reference to support union effort in contributing to how to make the new normal in the world of work beneficial to workers and their countries. The domestication of these instruments and their use can also help the recovery and reconstruction of our countries following the crisis of COVID-19.

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Zimbabwe: Dealing with **COVID 19** while the economy teeters on the edge.



Zimbabwe has been in a political and economic crisis for well over a decade. Politics in Zimbabwe during the period has been turbulent and characterized by authoritarianism and rights abuses while the country's economy has suffered

numerous ailments. These have included capital flight, low productivity, severe shortages of consumer goods, price control, currency and liquidity crisis. Thus, COVID-19 emerged onto an already fragile political economic situation in Zimbabwe.

The first case of the coronavirus in Zimbabwe was announced on the 21st March, 2020. Prior to that on March 19, President E.D. Mnangagwa had already declared COVID-19 as a national disaster. This was followed by Government constituting the National COVID-19 Inter-Ministerial Task Force chaired by the Vice President of the country.

Measures of restriction and lockdown

On 23rd of March 2020, the President announced a number of measures to contain and prevent further spread of the virus. They included:

i. Border control: banning of all non-essential travel and traffic, both outbound and inbound (excluding returning residents), except for movement of cargo.

ii. Banning of entertainment and recreational activities such as nightclubs, bars, beerhalls, movie houses, swimming pools, gymnasium and sporting activities.

iii. Restricting public gatherings: gatherings limited to a maximum 50 people in the following contexts: religious fellowships, weddings, conferences, workshops and funerals.

iv. Restricted hospital visits which came to one visit per day involving a relative per patient.

The President announced further measures on March 27, including:

i. A total lockdown for 21 days starting from Monday, the 30th of March 2020. Only essential movement related to seeking health services, the purchase or procurement of food, medicines

or other essential supplies and services was exempted.

ii. Suspension of all public transport operations excluding that of the government public transport company, Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO).

iii. Government and local authorities to ensure regular water supply to all areas as well as refuse collection;

iv. The establishment of a hotline #2019 for the period

v. Expedition of COVID-19 testing to be decentralized to provincial centres.

vi. Need for employers to show compassion to their workforce.

vii. Security forces may be deployed.

vii. Le déploiement éventuel des forces de sécurité.

Additional measures announced by Government on 14th of April involved:

i. Rolling out of mass COVID-19 testing: the target was to test a minimum of 1,000 people in a single day, targeting up to 33,000 people by end of April.

ii. All people above 60 years of age admitted in hospitals who have chronic diseases like asthma, hypertension, diabetes and heart diseases were to be tested.

iii. People who had been working during lockdown and interacting with the community such as law enforcement officers, employees from service providers like retail businesses, petrol attendants and food outlets employees were also to

be tested.

On the 20th of April, 2020 the lockdown was extended for an extra two weeks, up to the 3rd of May 2020.

The Easing of lockdown

On 1st May, 2020 the government announced the easing of lockdown regulations which would allow formal organisations in industry and commerce to resume operations once they met specified regulations, including mandatory testing and screening of employees. However, organized employers and trade unions condemned the Government's directive requesting employers to foot the bills for their employees' COVID-19 screening and test which cost as much as USD25 per person. Trade unions and employers submitted that based on the constitutional right of citizens to be protected in

health matters the cost for this had to be borne by Government. The Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) also took the matter to high court for the Government to reverse this directive.

The measure the government undertook to protect workers and the poor

- Treasury has a plan to set up an insurance scheme for Government workers whose work is directly involved in the fight against COVID-19. Discussions are underway with the Health Service Board and the Public Service Commission. However, this applies only to Government workers in the health sector, leaving all other workers exposed and vulnerable. The 2019 Labour Force and Child Labour Survey revealed that only 2% of the population is covered by some sort of medical aid, leaving 98% of

the population uncovered and at risk.

about inefficiencies in their operations.

- Treasury is to unveil ZWL\$200m (US\$8m) per month to 1 million vulnerable households for the next 3 months under the Cash Transfer Programme. This amounts to an average of ZWL\$200 per household per month. In a situation where a loaf of bread costs ZWL\$30, the ZWL\$200 amounts to only about 7 loaves of bread per month or barely enough to buy 2 litres of cooking oil. This is clearly a paltry amount.
- Government has also allocated ZWL\$ 50million (US\$2m) to Premier Service Medical Aid Society (PSMAS) which is the medical aid society for the majority of the civil service workers. However, PSMAS in recent years had been mired in corruption cases and clients complaints
- Government lifted the freeze on over 4,000 health posts that had been in force, making way for new employment in the health sector. Additional 200 health posts were also created.
- Treasury availed US\$2m for imports related to the fight against COVID-19
- Government is upgrading one of the major isolation centres at Wilkins Hospital in Harare with Chinese government support.

The WZL \$18 Billion Economic Rescue and Stimulus Package

On May Day, the Zimbabwean president announced a ZWL\$18 billion Economic Rescue and Stimulus Package to mitigate the

negative impact caused by the novel coronavirus on the national economy. In a special address to the nation, The President said the package is equal to 9 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or 28.6 per cent of the 2020 National Budget. "So far our response to this pandemic", he intimated, "has seen us putting in place a ZW\$18 billion Economic Rescue and Stimulus Package, which amounts to 9 per cent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or 28.6 per cent of the 2020 National Budget. The package is proportionate to the disruption the virus has caused in our national economy. This Economic Rescue and Stimulus Package is designed to scale-up production in all the sectors of the economy in response to the adverse effect of COVID-19".

He added that the rescue package will be used to prop up small-scale industries,

improve health facilities and cushion vulnerable groups in our society. He explained that the package will also be used to address the needs of the small scale industries, improve health facilities, reduce poverty and hardships and assist vulnerable groups in our society. "Our Rescue and Stimulus Package of ZW\$18 billion is therefore based on our aspiration to meet the diverse requirements of our national economy that include capacitating the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) as well as those in the informal sector", he stressed.

While this sounds like a commendable package, critics point to the fact that the figures in the package look fictitious since the government is too broke to afford a package of such magnitude. Apart from its own efforts, however, the government has also put out an international appeal for help and

various cooperating partners including the Chinese Government have pledged to support the country.

The role of the trade unions in fighting the COVID 19

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) made the first call for a national lockdown through a press statement on 20th March. This was before the Government announced the lockdown measures. More substantively, the unions provided a technical input paper on Workers' Response to COVID-19 to the Tripartite Negotiating Forum (TNF). This paper was used to develop a national TNF response.

Together with its research Institute, LEDRIZ, the ZCTU has been participating in an interactive weekly radio show programme on one of the local radio stations (CAPITAL K). The radio shows are

meant to intensify education and awareness on COVID-19, raise awareness on ZCTU participation in TNF as well as disseminate positions agreed at the TNF. It has also served as a platform for critiquing the Government's unilateral decisions and providing alternatives. The show has also served as a discussion forum for other stakeholders from the informal economy, ILO and Ministry of Labour and provided the occasion to respond to some workers' challenges emerging from the lockdown.

The unions have also been involved in providing e-materials on COVID-19 and created a specific COVID-19

WhatsApp platform for workers to air their challenges and grievances.

The trade unions have also participated in tripartite workplace health and labour inspections.

On Labour Day, the ZCTU

Message which was delivered live on Facebook by the ZCTU President focused on the theme for the celebration which was: 'Stop COVID-19 Pandemic, Scale up Social Protection and Dialogue, Save Jobs and Pay a Living Wage'.

The challenges that Zimbabwe faces in confronting the pandemic

While the government and other stakeholders appear to have been diligent in fighting the pandemic, their efforts have not been without challenges. Below are some identified challenges that require urgent redress to strengthen the fight:

- i. The government action is quite sluggish.
- ii. Slow disbursements of

funds that are in local currency. In an economy characterized by persistent inflations, slow disbursement of funds leads to avoidable loss of currency value.

- iii. Inconsistency in the use of social dialogue processes. At times, the government just releases unilateral statements and statutory instruments without reference to the TNF. A case in point is the recent directive for mandatory testing by employers which was not well received by the social partners.

iv. There is lack of transparency and accountability of funds received and disbursed - some corruption tendencies are emerging in the administration of COVID 19 funds.

v. There is absence of a clear criteria for selection of persons to be supported by government.

vi. In principle, sick leave is granted for all workers according to the Labour Act, but there has been no special announcements and clarification on this in the light of COVID-19.

vii. There are also delays in the decentralization of testing. Again, the slow pace at which test results for COVID-19 are released make it difficult to control the spread of the virus. The Government is already missing its own announced targets on testing.

viii. Additional deportees arriving from South Africa, Botswana and abroad also pose

a danger for escalating the pandemic. Although they are being quarantined fears remain of new cases emerging.

ix. There is lack of adequate public transport and the requisite application of WHO guidelines for workers since the relaxation of the national lockdown

As of May 13, 2020, Zimbabwe had recorded 37 COVID-19 cases, with 12 recoveries and 4 deaths. Like other countries, it is doing what it can to fight the coronavirus pandemic. The situation has been compounded by the particularly difficult political and economic circumstances of the country prior to the onset of the health crisis.

Like other political elites in Africa, the political elite of Zimbabwe needs to realize that when it comes to the basics of global survival, every people have to stay at home and make

the best of their circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that have been imposed all round must teach the lesson for our political leaders to appreciate the need to reach out in an even handed manner to different sections of our populations in order to garner all shoulders to the wheel for national reconstruction.

The ZCTU and Zimbabwe civil society have demonstrated resilience throughout the over one decade period of political and economic turmoil, uncertainty and crisis in Zimbabwe. During this period of existential crisis posed by the coronavirus they

have once again demonstrated the readiness and capacity to make their due contribution to the fortunes of their country.

We trust the trade unions of Zimbabwe to push as hard as they can for the political leadership of Zimbabwe to seize the opportunity of crisis offered by COVID-19 to provide the necessary space for the trade unions, business and other sections of Zimbabwe to join hands in reconstructing Zimbabwe from the doldrums it has been reduced to in recent times.

01**Should workers provide their own personal protective equipment against COVID-19?**

No, workers are not supposed to pay for personal protective equipment at the workplace. Employers have the duty to make the workplace safe. This includes providing personal protective equipment for workers and ensuring that work conditions are safe. For example, employers have to make the workplace hygienic, provide the necessary equipments like face masks and assure the necessary physical distancing at the workplace.

Madagascar: A Glimmer of Hope in the Fight against **COVID-19** ?



Madagascar has been in the spotlight as the world wages a fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This is for its “acclaimed invention of a cure” against the coronavirus and the fact that the country has not yet recorded any death since the report of its first three cases on

20th March, 2020. As of May 12, 2020, out of 5,000 or so persons tested, the country had recorded 187 positive cases with 101 recoveries. 86 persons were reported as active cases with 1 severe case.

Like others, the Government and people of Madagascar have been active in the fight to combat COVID-19 and contribute to efforts to find a solution. The Government adopted several measures to contain the spread of the virus beginning with a declaration of a State of Health Emergency which came into effect on March 19, 2020 upon suspicion of the entry of the virus into Madagascar.

The measures and interventions by Government have been developed by an inter-ministerial Committee created by the President to address the health crises. This Committee is chaired by the Prime Minister of Madagascar and has as its members, a National coordinator, representatives from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Communication and Culture, Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Tourism.

The measures adopted so far include:

1. Closure of air, road and naval borders with the exemption of transportation of food and goods as well as building materials after curfew i.e. from 9p.m. to 4a.m.
2. Partial lockdown in 3 out of the 22 regions that are affected by the coronavirus (Analamanga, Atsinanana and Haute Matsiatra).
3. Review of working hours. Official working hours for the public services have been reduced to half day from 8:00am to 1:00pm.
4. Sensitization of the public on enhanced hygiene protocols including wearing of masks; frequent washing of hands; on social distancing of 1 meter between persons in public, etc.

5. The Government has also undertaken the distribution of free masks to the public.

6. Provision and distribution of food and essentials including rice, soap, oil, candle, bowls, pasta, etc. to vulnerable people.

7. Creation of Community Committees (known as LOHARANO) in neighborhoods to ensure the proper conduct and control of the distribution of goods and equipment donated by the state.

8. Distribution of money to most affected sectors such as drivers of public transport (buses), city taxis, sex workers etc.

9. Distribution of Tambavy Covid-Organics to the entire Malagasy population. Covid-Organics is a herbal drink developed by the Malagasy Institute of Applied Research (IMRA) and alleged to

cure and prevent COVID-19.

10. Donations of the Covid-Organics drink to African countries (including Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast and Tanzania).

Role of Trade Unions in the Fight against COVID-19

Reports indicate that there were initial problems of non-payment of wages and dismissal of workers in a number of workplaces. However the Minister of Labor and the President of the Republic intervened following demands by the trade unions in Madagascar. A number of dismissed employees have been reinstated and their outstanding wages paid. Furthermore, an agreement has been reached to ensure that

textile companies in the Free Zone Areas such as AQUARELLE benefit from the contracts for the production of masks and accessories as well as hydro-alcoholic gels.

However, it still appears to be the preserve of private employers to take decisions and adopt measures that impact on the jobs of their workers. There are, thus, continuing reports of job losses in some private companies.

The trade unions have so far been active in advocating for workers'

rights and contributing to the smooth implementation of Government's measures in the fight against the pandemic. The unions, however, need to scale up their activism. It would help if the different national centers were to collaborate and work more closely together in developing a common strategy to engage employers and government. This can help in the protection of workers' rights during this period and also assist the unions in securing a stronger voice in the efforts at national recovery in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Largely the approach and measures adopted by the Malagasy government in the fight against COVID-19 appear progressive and seem to have

been effective in containing the spread of the virus. Noteworthy, the country has so far not recorded a single death since the outbreak of the disease.

The question on most minds is whether this can be attributed to the 'legendary herbal medicine' as propagated by the Malagasy Government and its citizenry. The herbal medicine is yet to be tested and approved by the World Health Organization and other relevant institutions.

A number of African countries have, however, taken the lead in ordering the medicine for use. They include Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Chad, Guinea Bissau, Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros and Tanzania.

On 7th of May, the World Health Organization (WHO) advised the government of Madagascar to take the product through a clinical trial and pledged its commitments to collaborate with them.

In a joint media briefing with the World Economic Forum, the WHO Regional Director for Africa, Matshidiso Moeti, cautioned and advised countries against

adopting a product that has not been taken through clinical tests for safety and efficacy.

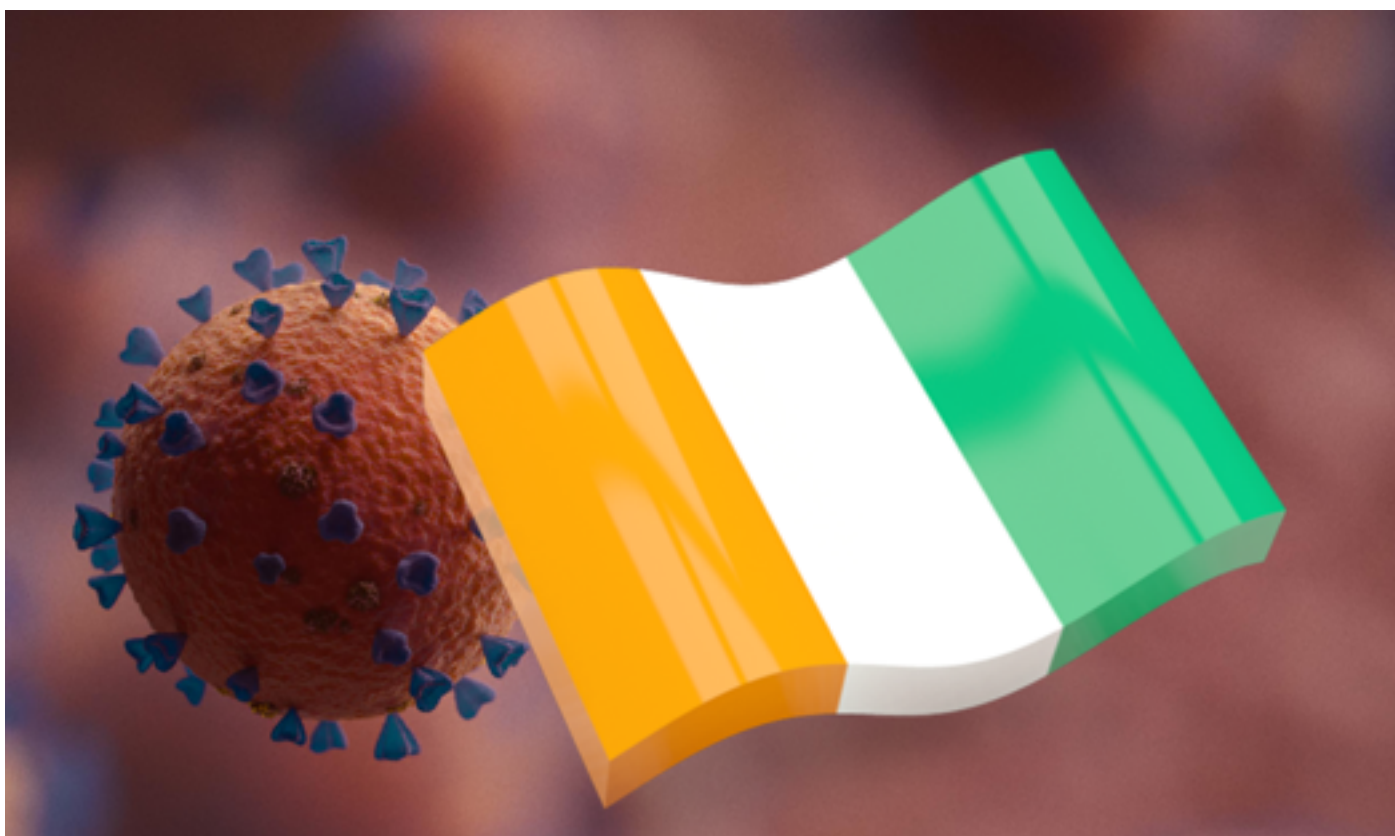
Meanwhile, South Africa has also moved forward with discussions towards supporting its fellow African country with the requisite resources and scientific expertise for testing following a call from the government of Madagascar, which asked for help with scientific research. The Health Minister Zweli Mkhize has, however, pointed out that South Africa will only get involved in a scientific analysis of the herb.

Clearly, a positive outcome of the clinical trials and consequent approval of the herbal medicine would not only be a win for Madagascar but for Africa and the world as a whole.

02**Is working from home compulsory?**

Working from home is recommended for all functions where it is possible to organise it, and in all companies and services, whatever their size. This contributes to avoiding crowded workplaces and instituting the necessary physical distancing for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

The **COVID-19** crisis: Côte d'Ivoire's response and gradual resumption of normalcy



Côte d'Ivoire recorded an economic growth of 7.3% in 2019, positioning the country as the engine of growth in West Africa. According to forecasts, with the coronavirus pandemic, this growth will be halved for the year 2020.

Since March 11, 2020, when

the health authorities confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire, the statistics have evolved rapidly. As of May 17, the country had officially registered 2,061 confirmed cases with 987 recoveries and 25 deaths. The Greater Abidjan area remains the most affected with 98% of the confirmed cases.

In his message to the nation on May 7, 2020, the Ivorian President, H.E. Alassane Ouattara, assessed the impact of the initiatives taken by the government in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, he announced some steps towards lifting some of the restrictions that were imposed at the onset of the crisis.

Initial Measures of restriction in response to Covid-19

- Establishment of a watch committee responsible for coordinating strategic directions and operational actions in the fight against the pandemic.
- Formulation of a response plan based on awareness-raising for the population to comply with COVID-19 prevention measures.
- Early detection, rapid management and confidential isolation and care of patients.
- Reinforcement of the capacities of the pharmaceutical industries, laboratories and diagnostic and care structures throughout the national territory.
- Establishment of a call center dedicated to Covid-19 and an alert and monitoring system using, in particular, new information and communication technologies.
- Closure of all food spots and restaurants, bars, nightclubs, cinemas and places of entertainment.
- Introduction of a curfew from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.
- Regulation of inter-urban, inter-municipal, intra-

municipal transport and prohibition of unauthorized travel between Abidjan and the inner country.

- Progressive lockdown of the populations by geographic area, depending on the evolution of the pandemic.
- Creation of humanitarian corridors to help people or communities in urgent need of assistance.

Economic and social measures

The Ivorian government also developed an Economic, Social and Humanitarian Support Plan estimated at 1,700 billion FCFA (about 3 billion USD). This Plan was aimed at mitigating the impact of the measures of restriction on the economy and livelihoods. The plan is summarized as follows:

- Support measures for businesses in the short term with the aim to maintain economic activity, relieve their cash flow and preserve employment. These measures were in general of a fiscal nature and included (1) the suspension of fiscal controls; (2) the exemption from payment of duties and taxes on health equipment and inputs for example; and (3) the postponement of tax payments for small and medium-sized enterprises for a period of three months.
- The measures and provisions to preserve production equipment and employment were: (1) the creation of a private sector support fund amounting to FCFA 250 billion (about 415 million USD); (2) the creation of a specific support fund of FCFA 100 billion (about 167 million USD). for businesses in the

informal economy; and (3) support for the agricultural sector - export production as well as food, vegetable and fruit production.

- Social measures included: (1) the 3 months shifting in the payment of electricity and water bills with payment facilities; (2) support for electricity and water bills for April and May for vulnerable groups within the limits of the social tranche; (3) the establishment of a solidarity fund estimated at 170 billion FCFA (about 300 million USD). as part of emergency humanitarian support for the most vulnerable populations; (4) distance education through television for National exam classes (final year) for primary, junior secondary and senior schools.

In his second message to the Nation on May 7, the President

made a summary assessment of all the initiatives taken by the State. He indicated that the fight against Covid-19 was certainly not won yet but that convincing results had been achieved in the country. He proceeded to announce the lifting of restrictive measures such as curfew, closure of bars, restaurants and places of entertainment on various parts of the country apart from the Greater Abidjan with effect from May 8, 2020. For the Greater Abidjan area the measures of restriction were to remain in force till May 15. The curfew hours for Abidjan, however, were changed from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m.

Involvement of the trade unions in the fight

Already on 25 March 2020, the trade union national centers in Côte d'Ivoire, namely, UGTCL, DIGNITE, FESACI, CSH and UNATRCI acted together with employers in the Permanent

Commission of Independent Consultation (CPIC) to sign a Memorandum of Understanding. In this protocol, the social partners gave their full support to the measures taken by the government in the fight against the spread of the pandemic and invited all actors in the world of work to scrupulously respect these measures.

At sectoral and workplace levels, the unions carried out awareness-raising in order to secure respect for the various measures taken by the authorities and for the preservation of jobs and social peace. Unions also engaged in the distribution of protective equipment to workers including masks, hand-washing kits and hydro-alcoholic gels. They also made financial contributions to the government's fund to support the measures.

Again, being concerned

about the need for a proper management of the difficult social situation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to protect actors in the world of work, proposals were made to the government and employers towards preserving the survival of businesses and jobs. Union proposals were taken into account in the eventual economic, social and humanitarian support plan amounting to 1,700 billion FCFA (about 3 billion USD). that was announced by the government on May 1.

With the gradual resumption of activities, the unions of Côte d'Ivoire are going to be challenged to make important input into how the country gets back into full stride and pays the necessary attention to the needs of workers in the process. The workers and their unions know well enough that economic growth in Côte d'Ivoire does not

benefit workers when the unions are divided and are therefore not able to demand the necessary accompanying social benefits and protection measures for workers. The COVID-19 pandemic is yet another wake-up call to unions on the importance of unity and solidarity for protecting and advancing workers rights and interests. Once again, the choice to remain stagnant or progress is there for us to make.

03

Working from home (WFH) is a new reality in the world of work. Some workers are already experiencing challenges with this reality. How can workers and trade unions deal with WFH?

Yes, there are some emergent challenges with WFH. Workloads appear to be increasing; work has to be carried on into late hours to accomplish tasks and meet deadlines; long hours of work make it difficult to have family time and to juggle between multiple roles of working, parenting and others; some employers are not paying for internet facilities; some employers are even organising unscheduled “inspection visits” to homes of employees to see if they are working.

Trade unions need to begin to discuss this new reality with employers and to develop policies to regulate this new normal in the world of work.

Dealing with the menacing **COVID 19**: The Zambian Approach!



The first cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the Republic of Zambia on March 18, 2020. This involved a Zambian couple who had returned from holiday in France. One week later on 25th March 2020, 10 more cases were detected among a group of Zambians of Pakistani

origin who had returned from a religious meeting in Pakistan. Following this sudden increase in the number of cases, the government began to disseminate key messages regarding the prevention measures that citizens should adopt to fight the virus. Citizens were told to wash hands often

with soap and use sanitizers; maintain social distance and wear masks in public places. People were also encouraged to stay home.

Government's restriction measures

Beyond the key messages, the Government announced extra measures to contain the spread of the virus and protect the citizens as follows:

i. Closed all schools, colleges and universities;

ii. Alerted all Zambian missions abroad to review the issuance of visas to people wanting to travel to Zambia.

iii. The Department of Immigration was requested to arrange for the screening at all port of entry into the country of travelers from countries affected

by COVID-19; upon screening those who exhibited symptoms would be quarantined in a medical facility for treatment, while other travellers without symptoms would also be quarantined for at least 14 days at their own cost.

iv. Government suspended non-essential foreign travel by officials, particularly to countries which had confirmed cases of COVID-19.

v. Public gatherings such as conferences, weddings, funerals, festivals were to be restricted to a minimum of 50 people subject to them complying with public health authority guidelines.

vi. Restaurants were to operate only on a take-away and delivery basis.

vii. All bars, night clubs, cinemas, gyms and casinos were

ordered to close.

viii. All international flights to and from Livingstone's Harry Mwanga Nkumbula, Ndola's Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe and Mfuwe international airports were suspended. Instead, all international flights had to arrive and depart from Lusaka's Kenneth Kaunda International Airport only. This was to ensure efficient and effective screening of travellers and the necessary follow up by health authorities;

While people were encouraged to stay at home, the country has not been in a complete lockdown yet. Key business activities and consumer chain stores have continued to operate despite the scaled down level of activities. Unlike other countries, no curfew was declared in Zambia.

Government's measures to protect the poor

Recognising that the measures put in place would negatively affect people's livelihoods, the Zambian government came up with supplementary measures aimed at lessening their impact. These included:

- i. Setting up an Epidemic Preparedness Fund under the Ministry of Health amounting to ZK57 million (approx. USD 3.2 million)
- ii. Cabinet approving a COVID-19 Contingency and Response Plan with a budget of ZK659 million (approx. USD 36.6 million) under the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit;
- iii. Releasing ZK500 million (USD 27.8 million) to reduce outstanding arrears to 1,500 pensioners under Public Service Pension Fund and retirees under Ministry of Justice;

iv. Releasing ZK170 million (approx. USD 9.5 million) to banks to reduce outstanding third-party arrears and other employee related commitments.

How COVID- 19 has impacted the Zambian economy

As the pandemic has unleashed untold social and economic havoc worldwide, Zambia has not been spared the onslaught. The COVID -19 has equally depressed economic activity in Zambia, adversely affecting levels of production, distribution and consumption in the national economy.

In response to this negative impact, the government of Zambia has instituted key measures to mitigate the impact. These include:

i. Government releasing ZK2.5 billion (approx. USD 140 million) to reduce domestic

arrears owed to domestic suppliers of goods and services;

ii. Government releasing ZK140 million (approx. USD 7.8 million) to pay local contractors in the road sector.

iii. In order to provide tax relief to businesses, the Government suspended custom duty on imported ethanol for use in alcohol-based sanitisers and other medicine-related products subject to guidelines issued by Zambia Revenue Authority.

iv. Government also relaxed payment of VAT on imported spare parts, lubricants, and stationery to ease pressure on companies;

v. Government also suspended import duties on the importation of concentrates in the mining sector to ease pressure on the sector; and

vi. Government suspended export duty on precious metals and crocodile skin.

vii. The government also announced through the Bank of Zambia a number of measures to encourage the use of digital financial services. These measures were aimed at preventing the spread of the disease by reducing cash transactions, decongesting banks and minimising person to person contact in the conduct of financial transactions.

The measures are:

- Waived charges for person to person electronic money transfers of up to ZK150. These transactions are now free of charge.
- Revised upwards transactions and balance limits for individuals, small scale farmer and enterprises. The limits

by agents have been revised upwards to give agents more float to deal with transactions. This was made to decongest banks.

- Removed the transaction and balance limits on agents and corporate wallets; and
- Reduced the processing fees for Real Time Gross Settlement System.

viii. The government has also made available a business stimulus fund of ZK10 billion (approx. USD 555.5 million) aimed at supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) affected by COVID-19.

The role of the trade unions in fighting the COVID 19

The role of trade unions has mainly been limited to advocating for the protection and respect of workers' rights, including the right to paid leave and job security during COVID-19. The unions in the mining industry, for instance, have been advocating and actively lobbying government for non-closure of one of Zambia's copper mines (Mopani Copper Mines) due to the impact of COVID-19. The unions in the health sector have also voiced out concerns about occupational health and safety for frontline healthcare workers.

Like their counterparts elsewhere, unions in Zambia have to continue to show interest in the impact of the pandemic on workers and in the protection of workers' rights and interests during this period. Importantly, Zambian unions also have to prepare for ensuring that workers interests are fully taken into account in the process of national recovery that is bound to follow the economic and social devastation wrought by COVID-19.

As of May 13, 2020 Zambia had a cumulative total of 446 cases with total recoveries of 124 and 7 deaths.

There is no doubt that the

Zambian government is doing all it can to tame the further spread of COVID-19 by educating the public about the virus, instituting preventive measures and at the same time working to ensure

that the instituted measures do not gravely affect the ability of citizens to earn their livelihoods. The mitigating social protection measures aimed at cushioning the citizens, coupled with the economic policies meant to prevent further damage to the economy, are all to be commended.

Trade unions have to remain vigilant and to monitor to ensure that the announced measures are implemented. But above all, unions must continue to act as a bulwark of workers' rights and those of the vulnerable sections of the population. In doing so the Zambian trade unions also have to develop their ability as a credible social partner that can be relied upon to champion the interests of the workers and that of the country as a whole in the coming period.

04**Can my employer force me to go on leave ?**

Normally the employer cannot compel this. Leave is normally agreed between the employer and the worker and this is often provided in the national labour legislation. It may also depend on the agreement signed between the employer and the trade union to which the worker belongs.

Depending on the laws and other agreements, in the event of force majeure or extraordinary circumstances (like COVID-19), temporary unemployment or dismissal may be applied. It is recommended to analyze the national legislation and to get your union to negotiate with the employer.

Management of the **COVID-19** crisis in Central Africa



In the Central African Republic, which is considered by the United Nations to be one of the «least prepared» countries in the world to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, one out of every two people is in need of humanitarian assistance and about 70% of health services are provided by humanitarian

organizations.

The COVID-19 health crisis comes at a time when the country is barely recovering from the politico-military crisis of 2013. The Central African Republic is ranked 188th out of 189, according to the Human Development Index (HDI) of the

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Although it is timidly regaining its place, the State is far from satisfying all the basic services of its population. If many Central Africans fear the possible spread of the COVID-19 it is mainly because the country lacks robust means to cope with such a situation.

As of May 28, 2020, the Central African Republic had 702 confirmed cases with 23 recoveries and 1 death. The first case of the coronavirus was reported in the country on March 14, 2020.

Restrictive measures

Given the vulnerability of the country due mainly to the weakness of its health system and the fragility of the economy, aggravated by its landlocked status, the President called on all actors to act vigorously.

The Government's initial response was based on four

priority actions: screening, quarantine, treatment of patients and follow-up of contact cases. As a result, nearly 1,000 suspected cases have been identified and are being followed up on a daily basis.

The government then enacted control measures with the aim of preventing or limiting local transmission. These include:

- Suspension of the entry into the Central African Republic to foreigners citizens from countries with infections, with the exception of diplomats and NGOs officials.
- Closure of all pre-school, school and university establishments for a period of 15 days, renewable, if necessary.
- Closure of bars, dancing clubs, refreshment stands, cafés and beverage depots.
- Ban on public gatherings of

more than 15 people.

privacy.

- Closure of the airport, except for humanitarian flights, cargo flights, aircraft in technical difficulties without passenger disembarkation or authorized special flights.
- Total prohibition for any suspected person to leave the quarantine area, except on the advice of a doctor.
- Mandatory isolation for confirmed cases.
- Extension of quarantine and lockdown period from 14 to 21 days based on epidemiological data.
- Mandatory reporting to the health authorities of any person suspected of being infected with the coronavirus.
- Limitation of mourning, marriage and dowry ceremonies to strict family
- Restriction of population movements between Bangui and the provinces. This measure aimed to prevent the spread of the infection from the capital to provinces in case of local transmission in Bangui.
- Establishment of local crisis committees in provinces.
- Suspension of religious ceremonies and gatherings of more than 15 people.

Social and economic implications

The two speeches by the President of the Republic did not provide any measures to address the situation of companies and workers, despite the fact that the state acknowledged that the coronavirus epidemic is growing at an alarming rate.

The economic and social level of

the majority of the population does not allow them to obtain protection kits, and even less, to endure lockdown. This is because many Central Africans earn income on a daily basis.

The Central African Republic has benefited from several grants. The European Union has pledged 30 million euros and 3 million US dollars from the USA in grants through direct projects or in cash.

The Development Bank of Central African States (BDEAC) has decided to directly support the response programmes of CEMAC member countries (Congo, Gabon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Central Africa Republic and Cameroon) against COVID-19 by making 3 billion CFA francs (approx. USD 5 million) available to them.

On April 23, the World Bank approved a \$7.5 million grant from the International

Development Association (IDA) to help the Central African Republic address the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthen the preparedness of national systems for public health emergencies. The project will provide medical equipment and essential medicines, test kits and personnel protection equipment for workers on the front line and ensure the population's access to water and hygiene products. It will also help to improve coordination and support for preparedness measures, train health workers and organise communication and awareness campaigns on the risks involved among the population.

The announcement of all these donations and grants has sparked debate in the public and political spheres about the proper management of these funds. The Opposition Coalition as well as various personalities are questioning the use and

management of the funds allocated to the fight against COVID-19. Meanwhile the government has provided the assurance that a committee to manage the funds placed under the President of the Republic within the framework of the crisis committee is envisaged and the modalities of this management are in the process of being defined.

Role of Trade Unions

Not much information has emerged on how the trade unions in the Central African Republic are responding to the crisis posed by COVID-19. As expected of their counterparts elsewhere, this time of crisis demands that they stand up and be counted. The needs of safety at work, for attention to public health, for social protection and for income protection, all cry out as needs that trade unions must help to address in these critical times.

Time is opportune for the trade unions to reflect on their current situation and

to unite within their ranks and act together so they can enter into social dialogue with employers and government on how to address the challenges posed by the coronavirus. Closing ranks can also help the unions to reach out to the wider constituency of informal economy operators who are also workers and suffer the negative impacts of the COVID-19. Unions owe a duty to strive to provide a voice that raises the interests of workers strongly as the country responds to the COVID-19 pandemic and makes the effort to rise up

from its weak and fragile situation.

In the Central African Republic, humanitarian organizations are the essential elements of the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic. The country still depends as much on the 164 humanitarian organizations present on its soil (93 national NGOs, 56 international and UN agencies).

Although they all run their own programmes, these NGOs coordinate their activities through «clusters» (health, nutrition, child protection, etc.). Nevertheless, the organizations had to review their priorities. In the field, teams are adapting to continue providing vital aid to sections of the population and transforming programmes to protect them as best they can from the coronavirus. But this new crisis is too much for a

humanitarian response that was already running out of steam in the face of exploding needs and lack of funding.

According to the United Nations Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), nearly 2.7 million Central Africans (out of a population of 4.7 million) are still in need of water, care and food.

Coronavirus is not the only virus threatening the Central African Republic, where the population has been facing a measles epidemic for more than a year. This has affected more than 7,600 people and caused 83 deaths, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Different sectors of society in the Central African Republic must work hard to find each other and

to develop cooperation at his critical time. But is it also a country that demands close attention and solidarity from the African Union and the rest of Africa.

BURUNDI: an exceptional case of fighting the **COVID-19** Pandemic against the backdrop of a presidential election.



The Republic of Burundi registered its first two confirmed cases of Coronavirus on 31st, March 2020. According to the Minister of Health, these included two people who had returned from countries already affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The announcement was made in

the context of the preparations for the presidential election, which was scheduled to take place on 20 May, 2020. Following that, the Burundian authorities continued to issue messages downplaying the danger posed by the new virus, made religious invocations and called for calm, asking the

population not to panic.

Government measures put in place

Nevertheless, despite the apparent optimism, the Government of Burundi gradually put in place restrictive measures to contain the spread of the pandemic.

These included:

- Systematic testing of contacts of confirmed cases.
- Closure of Bujumbura International Airport and ban of flights, with the exception of cargo, medical and diplomatic flights.
- Closure of border posts, with the exception of road transport of food products and other cargo transport.

- Returning persons were subjected to quarantine of 14 days in hotels and other centres set up for this purpose.
- An awareness-raising campaign on measures to contain the spread of the virus was initiated. This consisted of frequent hand washing with soap, avoiding handshakes and maintaining a social distance of one metre.

These were minimal measures that reflected the political will to fight the pandemic and avoid slowing down normal life. Be that as it may, the shadow of the upcoming presidential election continued to lurk in the background.

In this context, businesses and shops continued their activities; a normal return to school took place on April 19, after the Easter holidays; the Football

Federation decided to resume their championship; and the local election campaign that had already begun was carried on.

Challenges to the implementation of preventive measures

Admittedly, the Burundian government seems to have got the situation under control, notwithstanding some difficulties it encountered at the beginning of the implementation of the measures.

For example, truck trailers transporting goods from the ports of Dar-es-Salam in Tanzania and Mombassa in Kenya through Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda were banned from crossing the border between Burundi and Rwanda. This was despite the 25th March, 2020 declaration of the meeting of Ministers of Health that called for compliance with the protocol

on the free movement of goods between member states of the East African Community (EAC) during this period.

It is also worth noting the incident that occurred on 2 April in one of the communes, against the backdrop of tensions during the election campaign. Two Burundian citizens returning from neighbouring Tanzania were killed by unknown assailants while on their way under guard to a quarantine centre for COVID-19 patients. The government was quick to call local officials to order for strict adherence to protective measures for those who should be quarantined.

In view of this situation, it should be noted that in the short term there is no major impact on socio-economic life, given that the large part of the population lives mainly from agriculture and in rural areas.

On the other hand, speculative price increases were noted, but the situation was quickly brought under control.

Some businesses that offer mainly imported products have experienced a decline in activity due largely to the lack of products and customers who are mostly expatriates.

Union intervention

Reports indicate that the Confederation of Trade Unions of Burundi (COSYBU) immediately joined the management of the national response against the spread of COVID-19.

COSYBU has identified viable short-, medium- and long-term solutions for individuals, communities, trade unions, employers' associations and their affiliates.

COSYBU affiliates, in particular the health workers' union, initiated a bi-tripartite project with the employers' association of Burundi to solicit financial and technical support for the joint development and implementation of a multi-sectoral strategic platform to support workers and business owners affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social partners were set to achieve the following objectives:

- Building the resilience of the labour market through local social dialogue;
- adapting protective equipment and occupational health and safety advice ;
- providing accurate information to limit the impact of sudden unemployment and loss of income arising from the adverse consequences of the

COVID-19 pandemic;

- intensifying campaign for compliance with the measures taken by the Government.

More concretely, COSYBU, in collaboration with its affiliates, already distributed 650 masks, 650 bottles of disinfectants, 60 buckets containing water with chlorine in 8 meetings held in 22 vulnerable workplaces to set an example.

Again, unlike many countries around the world, Burundi celebrated May Day, the International Workers' Day, with rallies and parades, as usual.

The trade union representative's speech focused mainly on respect for workers' rights; the appeal to workers and employers for strict observance of social distancing measures in the workplace and elsewhere; and

the appeal to the Government to facilitate the acquisition of protective equipment and to grant tax benefits.

COSYBU also requested an urgent meeting of the social partners to determine the appropriate measures to help the population - workers and businesses affected by the consequences of COVID-19, in particular, those affected by reduction in income, the closure of businesses, technical unemployment, and the decline of informal economy activities.

One of the Burundian leaders indicated that Burundi was an exception among other nations because was specially favored by God.

As far as the management of the pandemic is concerned, Burundi approach has been different and atypical, probably

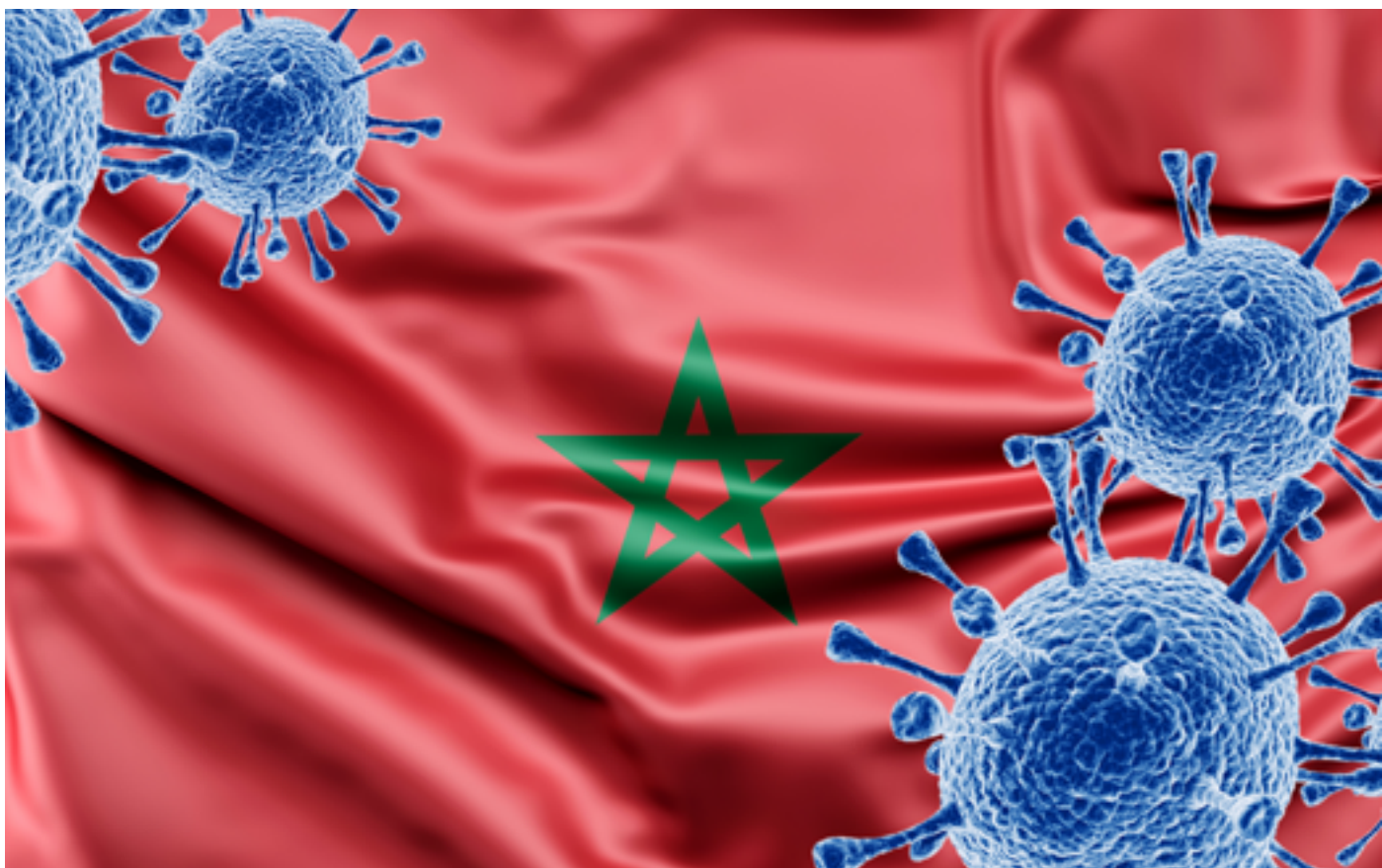
because of what was at stake politically in respect of its presidential elections. Generally, the population has been more concerned about the presidential election than about the danger posed by the coronavirus.

Relying on the low number of cases compared to other countries in the sub-region, notwithstanding the fact that the number of tests carried out is among the lowest in Africa (24 per 1 million inhabitants. www.worldometers.info/coronavirus), Burundi could be a case study to be analysed in depth at the end of the cycle, if the situation does not deteriorate in the medium term.

It should be noted that COSYBU and its affiliates have shown courage and determination in a rather complex context. Beyond their contribution to the debate and to the application of the directives issued by the Government, they must continue

to remain lucid and vigilant in order to anticipate any negative effects that may result from an inappropriate management of the COVID-19 pandemic and which would jeopardize the economy and the well-being of workers and the population.

Morocco's Strategy Facing **COVID-19**



Morocco joined early the league of African nations that received the coronavirus. Following the announcement of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 on March 02, 2020, Morocco implemented a major response plan to fight against the spread of the virus and to cope with the

economic and social impacts of the health crisis. With a total of 7,584 confirmed cases, 4,969 recoveries and 202 deaths as of May 27, 2020, Morocco is one of the African countries most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures of restriction

Actions were quickly launched to minimize the spread of the virus with the establishment of «Coronavirus Command Stations» throughout the territory to ensure monitoring and coordination with health services.

The Moroccan government declared a state of health emergency. Drastic measures were instituted to impose a compulsory general lockdown from March 20 until May 20. This included a closure of borders, a ban on assemblies and the closing of schools. Restrictions were placed on sporting and cultural events, including closing of stadia to the public. Recently, a night curfew during the Ramadan period was also imposed. Local shops were no longer allowed to remain open after 6 p.m.

Health and sanitary measures

The actions undertaken here concerned the increase and

the reorganization of hospital capacities and the improvement of the conditions of reception of patients in various cities of Morocco. This applied especially to cities with high human density that were more exposed to the risk. Military field hospitals have been deployed in the cities or their outskirts to strengthen the civilian health system in bedding and equipment for intensive care. Batches of medical and sanitary equipment have been deployed in health facilities. Stocks of drugs have been built up, in particular, chloroquine produced by a pharmaceutical group based in Morocco. Moroccan companies specializing in the manufacture of medical equipment (e.g. ventilators) have also been approached by accelerated procedures. Industrial companies have been able to readjust their production tools and processes to produce ventilators and face masks.

The territorial coverage of tests

and analyses has been widened and extended to University Hospital Centers in different regional metropolises and military hospitals. Finally, free access to care was assured, including screening, testing and treatment in hospital; and even payment for quarantining in hotels where persons had to be isolated.

The impact of the crisis

The economic consequences of the crisis have been enormous. The tourism and transport sectors, the real lungs of the Moroccan economy have been severely affected by the crisis. The Moroccan Tourism Confederation already announced a loss of 34.1 billion dirhams (approx. USD 3.5 billion) in tourism turnover in 2020, including 14 billion (USD 1.4 billion) for the hotel industry. At least 500,000 jobs and 8,500 companies directly or indirectly linked to the hotel business in the country are reported

to be threatened. Recently, the Moroccan airline Royal Air Morocco, announced that they had great financial difficulties in the payment of salaries of their 3, 420 direct employees and 4,000 workers in other related branches.

Besides tourism, disruptions in global value chains could also affect the auto industry, which accounts for the largest share of Morocco's exports, with sales equivalent to 6% of GDP in 2017-2019. The slowdown in global growth could also weigh on Morocco's other exports, mainly phosphates which represents 4.4% of its GDP.

Socio-economic measures

In order to support the sections of the population most affected by the crisis, Morocco set up an Economic Watch Committee (CVE) to assess and anticipate the direct and indirect economic repercussions of COVID-19 on them.

The “Special Fund for the Management of the Coronavirus Pandemic” which was endowed with a capacity of 3% of the GDP was created. The Fund has benefited from the contributions of various private and public entities to the tune of more than 32 billion dirhams (approx. USD 3.2 billion) in donations. In addition, Morocco mobilized on April 7, 2020 an amount of USD 2.97 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This resource would allow them to limit the social and economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and to maintain an adequate level of their official reserves.

The CVE adopted a series of support and accompanying measures dedicated to workers and companies in the private sector who had been put in difficulty by the slowdown or cessation of activities as a result of the pandemic. The Committee announced the suspension of

the payment of social security and the establishment of specific allowances for micro-businesses and the employees affiliated to the Moroccan social security.

Employees affiliated to the Moroccan Social Security who found themselves on sick leave were to receive compensation of 2,000 DH net (approx. USD200) per month, financed by the special fund for the management of the effects of coronavirus for the period from March 15 to June 30, 2020. They were also to continue benefitting from family allowances and Compulsory Health Insurance (AMO). It would also be possible for them to postpone the maturation of bank loans for the months of March, April, May and June, without paying any fees or penalties. These would be carried over to the end of the credit after the last scheduled maturity.

Companies that carried on activities but which suffered from cash flow difficulties could get an additional line of credit guaranteed by the State from the banks.

Informal economy workers as main victims of the crisis who also constitute an important part of the Moroccan economy were not forgotten. Households operating in the informal sector and which hold a card of the Medical Assistance scheme set up by Morocco for the benefit of the poor "RAMED", benefited from subsistence aid. Families that are not affiliated to the "RAMED" but operating in the informal sector and which had lost their income because of the lockdown were also to benefit from the state subsistence aid.

Union involvement

Trade Union organizations congratulated the government for the urgent measures taken in response to the COVID-19

Crisis. They called on workers to respect the lockdown and health measures put in place as well as engage in all national initiatives deployed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

Despite the accompanying measures taken by the State, such as financial compensation for workers in the informal sectors and those affiliated to the National Social Security Fund (CNSS), trade union organizations called on the government to take into account the situation of a broad category of citizens who were forced to work in these exceptional circumstances to be able to have their daily livelihood.

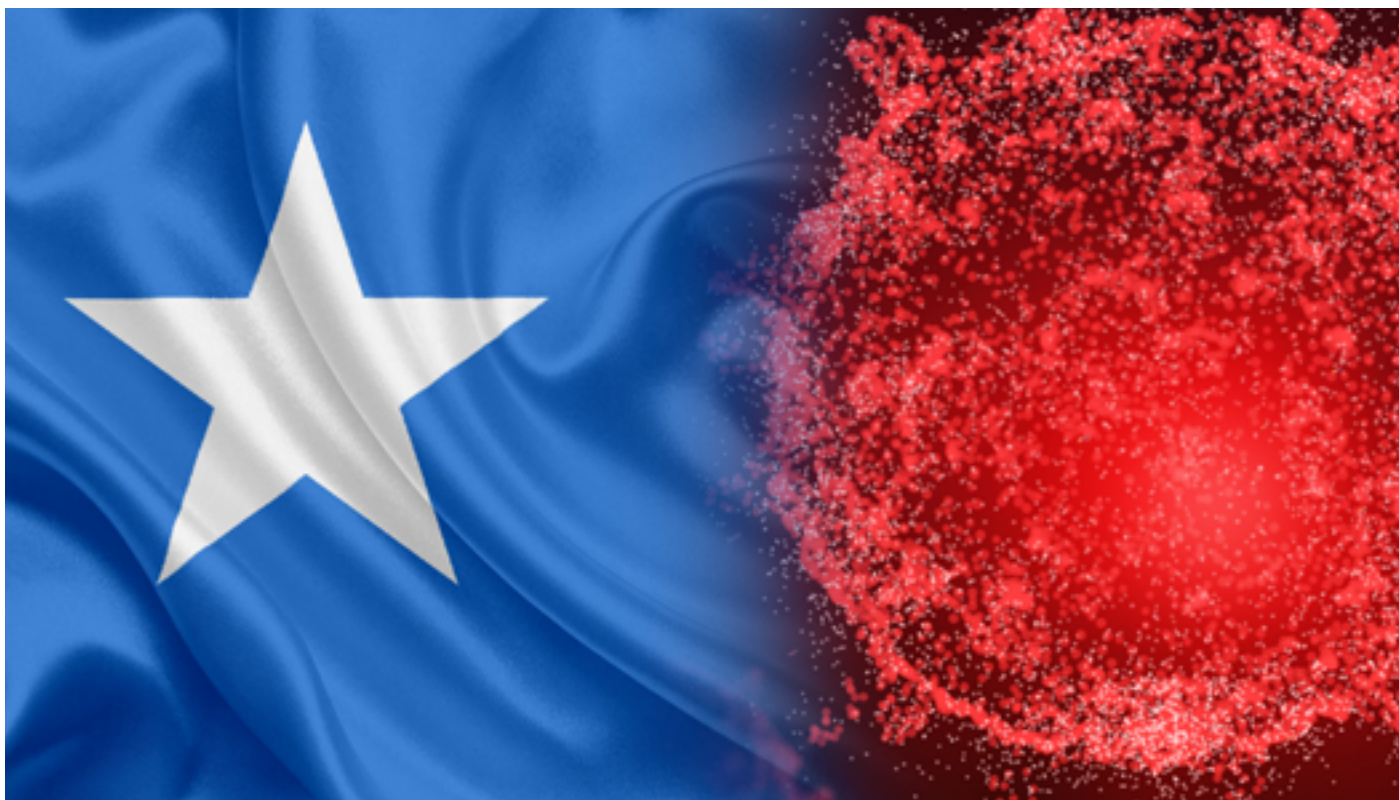
In addition, as part of the voluntary contribution to fight the COVID-19, Moroccan trade union organizations have undertaken voluntary actions such as the distribution of protective health equipment to vulnerable sections of the

population.

The unions have called on the government to take all preventive measures to ensure safe return of workers back to work.

To cope with the pandemic and limit its economic and social impacts, trade unions have also asked the State to undertake specific programs with public investments as part of a major job creating venture.

Somalia – a global health crisis and insurgency: a bad cocktail for a country in the throes of nation-building



Somalia has been slowly moving out of a state of protracted military conflict. The central (federal) government does not have firm and effective control of large parts of the country. The country, especially the rural areas in the South, is dominated by the terrorist

group Al-Shabab, which has a notorious history of violently disrupting humanitarian work. Severe poverty and hunger faces many people, leaving them vulnerable. Nevertheless, there is resilience in the people, evident from their struggle to end the insurgency and to reconstruct and reconcile their

country. This is the context in which the coronavirus arrived at the shores of Somalia, threatening to thwart the country's slow but steady strides in nation-building that were underway.

The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Somalia on the 16th of March 2020 in Mogadishu, the nation's capital city. The Federal Government of Somalia led by President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo has since taken some measures to stem the spread of the disease and ultimately to defeat it. As of May 15, 2020, Somalia had recorded 1,284 confirmed cases with 53 dead and 135 recoveries.

Public health measures

- The government formed a task force to respond to COVID-19. This task force does not have trade union and employers' representatives.

- Closure of schools, including universities, took effect from the 19th of March 2020. Large gatherings were also interdicted.
- Ban on passengers who had been to China, Iran, Italy, or South Korea in the 14 days preceding March 19 from entering Somalia.
- Suspension of all international flights with the possibility of exceptions for humanitarian flights.
- Adoption of quarantine measures.
- Curfew imposition with an exclusion for essential services workers and support staff with official movement permit. As at the time of filing this report, all these measures adopted by the central government are still in

place.

Given the historical ties between Somalia and Italy, the Somalia Federal Government sent 20 volunteer doctors from the Somali National University to assist Italy in the fight against the pandemic.

Economic measures

Some of the economic and fiscal measures that the government adopted included:

The announcement by the Prime Minister, Mr. Hassan Ali Khaire of government's provision of \$5m to deal with the disease. Aside from the announcement of the fund, there is no evidence that the Somali central (Federal) Government made any employment-related provisions. Laying-off of private-sector workers under the "no-work-no-pay" policy is being implemented by several private sector businesses. This

is a policy the Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU) has strongly rejected.

Gaps observed in the measures adopted

- Similar to other African countries, Somalia is experiencing critical shortages of medical supplies and Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs) for medical careworkers. There were initial reports that Somali health officials initially had trouble obtaining medical equipment but did successfully order some ventilators and ICU beds. Information that only one hospital, the Martini Hospital in Mogadishu, is the medical facility dedicated to the treatment of COVID-19 patients, is an indication of the inadequate healthcare infrastructure and signals the gravity of the challenge in dealing with the pandemic in Somalia.

- Somalia does not have testing capabilities. Test samples are taken abroad for analysis and results returned later. This has contributed to the testing challenge in the country as it means testing results come late. Asymptomatic persons who are not tested can easily spread the virus. The dearth in testing capabilities has also placed a restraint on tracing persons who have had contact with index cases.
- The level of poverty in the country has been seen as partly responsible for the weak adherence to the social distancing measures put in place. Somalia is a country with over 80% of the economy being informal and also heavily dependent on remittances from abroad. Speaking to these limitations, the Somali Medical Association expressed concerns that the death toll in the country from COVID-19 may be huge and that Somalia may not be able to recover from the economic effects. Their predictions are premised on the poor working relations between the central government and states in the federation which leads to lack of control and poor coordination by the central government in the fight against the pandemic.
- The awareness measures adopted could benefit from more intensity and consistency. Communication needs to be boosted to raise sufficient awareness of the people and to elicit compliance with announced public health protocols and adoption of the necessary social distancing measures. Low level of awareness is partly responsible for why people, especially in Mogadishu, still gather in crowded areas.

Somali trade union contributions to the fight against COVID-19

- FESTU issued a statement to highlight the shortcomings of the intervention measures by the public authorities and proposed necessary actions to rectify these shortcomings.
- FESTU has supported and complemented government's COVID-19 awareness and education measures. It has issued statements focusing on the need for workers and the people of Somalia to heed government's advice on social distancing and the practising of responsible hygiene and sanitation practices. Affiliates of FESTU have included in the curricula of their workplace-based training programs, topics on how workers can protect themselves and prevent the spread of the coronavirus as well as mitigate the impact of the COVID-19.
- FESTU actively campaigned for debt cancellation for Somalia for the country to acquire the necessary fiscal space for dealing with the crisis. Once resources have been freed domestically with debt cancellation FESTU has continued to advocate for a social protection floor for all Somalis including the most vulnerable.
- FESTU has been actively rejecting the laying-off of workers, mostly in the private-sector in this time of COVID-19. The mass-sack of private sector workers by several private business operators is being carried out under the broad interpretation of the implementation of the "no-work-no-pay" policy meant for voluntary workers' withdrawal of their labour.
- FESTU has appointed a Desk Official at its Secretariat to be

responsible for the compilation of COVID-19 induced workers' rights violation complaints across all economic sectors. This is an important step that should help in the continuous monitoring and reporting of rights violations that can help prevent a national emergency from being used as a pretext to clamp down on civil liberties.

- The union can also contribute to dispel misinformation and false news that are peddled to undermine the fight against the pandemic. Some persons, including even journalists, are reported to have been arrested and detained for spreading false information. The journalists' union can provide special training to its members on how to fact-check COVID-19 information and also on how to counter misinformation. This should help in the identification of the union as a credible and

reliable partner in the fight against the coronavirus in Somalia.

COVID-19 has come to worsen an already fragile situation in Somalia. The mobilization of various sections of the population is essential for tapping fully into their resilience and in ensuring that the country does not become overwhelmed by the toxic mixture of the health crisis with the situation of insurgency in the country. The trade union effort in contributing to the fight against the pandemic can be stepped up towards assuring more inclusiveness in the national effort as a whole.

Already the Secretary-General of the United Nations has issued a global clarion call for the cessation of hostilities around the world so that everyone can focus on the fight against COVID-19. The trade unions can respond to this call by

considering how they can also push further for cessation of violence in the Somali situation. The trade unions may build on the caution issued by the Somali Medical Association about the difficulty of post-crisis recovery for Somalia to draw attention to the need for all contending forces in Somalia to seize hostilities now and for clans, regions, state governments, federal government, employers, trade unions and all others, to move towards collaboration for the very survival of the country as an entity.

As the country prepares to move away from the heavy restrictions that were imposed at the beginning of the health crisis, the trade unions can discharge themselves creditably by preparing to engage effectively with the national recovery effort. This must be done in a manner that will benefit workers and the vulnerable sections of

the population. A trade union assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on employment and well being of different categories of workers can help the formulation of specific measures for the benefit of workers. Such measures can be tabled in the Social Dialogue Forum that has been recently established in Somalia. FESTU has to exercise initiative in giving meaningful life to a national tripartite institution that was born shortly before this particularly challenging time.

CAPE VERDE: Stop the **COVID-19** Pandemic, let's enhance our solidarity!



The Republic of Cape Verde is an island state located in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of West Africa. It is an archipelago of ten volcanic islands with an area of 4033 km².

The country is currently at a

crossroads and is finding it difficult to develop a more sustainable growth model that is not dependent on its service sector, which is known for its strong concentration on tourism but oriented towards greater diversification of the production base. Cape Verde, whose tourism accounts for

20 per cent of GDP, is among the destinations most likely to suffer from travel restrictions related to the pandemic.

Early measures and response plan for civil protection

On 16th March, 2020, the Government announced a number of contingency measures throughout the national territory including:

(a) Activation of the National Council for Civil Protection, as the national coordinating body for civil protection;

(b) Improvement of the state of preparedness of the security forces and services and of all civil protection agents, with the strengthening of the means for possible support operations in the field of public health ;

(c) Activation of the National Emergency Fund, with a view

to financing prevention and response actions within the framework of civil protection and the national health system;

(d) Creation of a national stockpile of personal protective equipment for the fire brigade, police and armed forces;

(e) Strengthening of the reception and deployment capacity of the Green Line 8001112, with the installation of more service stations, as well as the assignment of health professionals to serve the population during the day;

(f) Restriction to public events that bring together a significant number of participants in open or closed spaces, regardless of their nature;

(g) Restrictions on the operation of gastronomic shops until 9 p.m., including bars, restaurants

and terraces, with a total ban on consumption in open spaces, with the operating capacity being reduced by one third;

(l) Determination of the setting of frequency limits and the organisation of public assistance services, in particular with regard to the organisation of queues and the imposition of a minimum safety distance.

Exceptions applied to emergencies such as the movement of technicians and maritime connections for the transport of goods, normal supply of the market by commercial and fishing vessels.

Due to the disaster risk situation in the country, the Government ordered the closure, from 27 March to 17 April, of all public services and businesses in order to strengthen measures to combat COVID-19. **On 28 March 2020, a state of emergency**

was declared in Cape Verde for the first time ever to allow for the implementation measures that would help reduce social contacts.

It is instructive that the range of initial measures were taken prior to the confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in Cape Verde which occurred on March 20, 2020. As of May 26, 2020 390 cases had been confirmed with 155 recoveries and 4 deaths.

The new emergency measures included:

- The closure of external, internal, air and sea borders and the ban on passenger transport in Cape Verde.
- The suspension of flights between the islands and of maritime connections, with the exception of flights and maritime connections carried out for health, civil protection

and emergency purposes.

- People arriving in the city of Praia, the capital, are placed in mandatory quarantine.
- Schools were closed until April 17.
- All public services and public enterprises on the national territory were closed; depending on the circumstances, distance working and working from home could be used.

However, these measures did not apply to public health, security, civil protection, ports and airports, national identification registry and court emergency services.

Urban and interurban public passenger transport were cut in half in terms of traffic frequency

and capacity. Municipal markets were allowed to operate with a minimum number of employees and customers.

Social support measures

The Government gave a guarantee that under no circumstances will workers be prejudiced in their employment and wages.

The Government further announced a package of measures for families that are economically dependent on informal work and had lost their livelihoods and had alternative to daily income because of the crisis.

The measures included:

1. The allocation of the Social Inclusion Income to 8,000 families in extreme poverty. 68% of these families live in rural areas. This represents a

monthly investment of 44,000 escudos. The implementation of a solidarity income scheme for workers in the REMPE scheme and self-employed workers in the informal sector, including informal trade vendors and municipal markets.

These workers are guaranteed 10,000 escudos for one month. With this measure, 30,000 workers should benefit. The investment value is 300,000 escudos for a period of one month.

2. Immediate food aid is also guaranteed to 22,500 families, corresponding to approximately 90,000 people whose income is below the minimum wage or who have no source of income. This represents an investment of 21 billion escudos and food security for approximately 30,000 children attending the education system and belonging to the most vulnerable households.

3. Home care measures for the elderly and dependent persons living in isolation will also be stepped up, with the recruitment of social workers, caregivers and volunteers to guarantee assistance in liaison with the services of the Town Halls, Civil Protection and Health. This covers 712 elderly people in care facilities, who will begin to receive home care.

4. The measures announced are in effect for a period of one month, with the hope that after this period the restrictions imposed as part of the prevention of COVID-19 will be lifted. If the situation does not improve significantly, measures to protect families and income will continue. Decisions will be taken in advance.

5. As regards families and businesses with loans from banks, a three-month moratorium will be granted on

the payment of debt maturities until June this year.

N.B 100 Cape Verdean Escudos is equivalent to 0.99 US dollars

The Role of Trade Unions

While there is not much information on union role during the period, unions are called upon to:

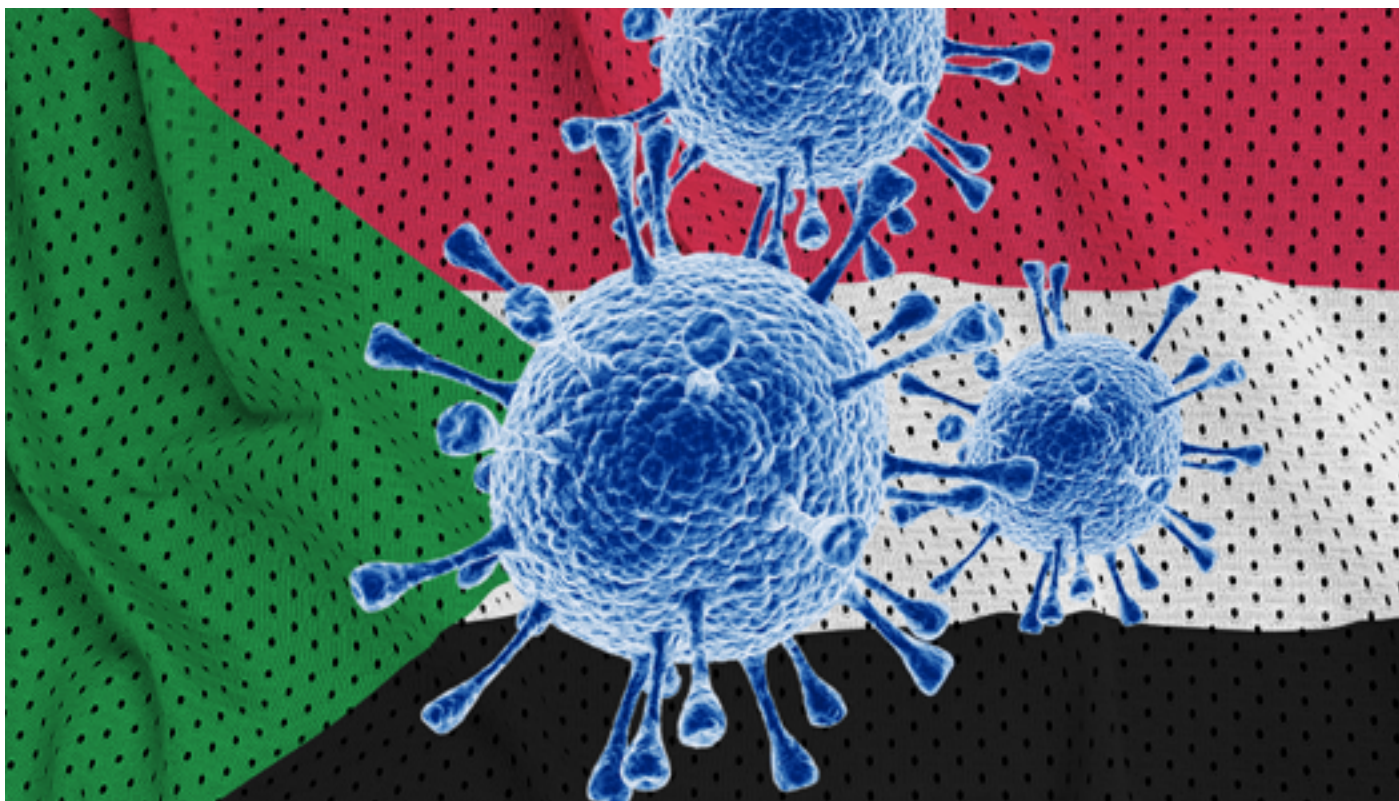
- Strengthen their unity of action in the face of COVID-19;
- be involved in all awareness-raising and support actions for vulnerable and precarious workers;
- in particular, unions should actively demand personal protective equipment for workers and negotiate to secure the safety of workplaces and safeguard the health of workers;
- become actively involved in the management mechanism of the COVID-19 Fund so that they can promote transparency of the measures and play the role of a watchdog and whistle-blower;
- participate in the framework of social dialogue for the maintenance and creation of massive and decent jobs. Trade union demands and negotiations should focus initially on preserving the wages and benefits of

workers affected by short-time working;

- become involved in the post-COVID-19 economic recovery policy, with emphasis on the

strengthening of social protection systems, the health sectors, the reinforcement of health infrastructures, education, the environment and tourism.

Sudan - from consolidating the people's revolution to the fight to defeat an invisible viral enemy



Discovery COVID-19 after a death

The Sudanese people, after months of sustained protests across the cities and streets of the country in 2019, successfully got rid of President Omar Ahmed al-Bashir in an unarmed revolution. The country was

gradually settling into her strides to consolidate the revolution when this was disrupted by the appearance of the coronavirus. Precisely on the 13th of March 2020, Sudan reported its first novel coronavirus case. The index case was a man who died on the 12th of March. He was reported to have visited

the United Arab Emirates in the first week of March. As of May 11, 2020 the Sudan had reported 1,365 confirmed cases of COVID-19; 70 dead and 149 recoveries.

To stem the tide and pace of infection of COVID-19, Sudan's Transitional Government adopted the following measures

Public health measures

- The establishment of the High-Level Task Force for COVID-19;
- Initial curfew in all parts of the country, which was later in April, made into a total lockdown imposition.
- Schools, sports, entertainment and religious centers closed.
- All airports and borders closed.
- Ban on inter-city travel, especially to Khartoum, which

is the city with the highest number of infected cases; quarantine and isolation facility centers established to keep persons returning from high-infection locations/territories, as well as persons known to have come into contact with index cases.

- The Council of Ministers agreed to give additional powers to the health ministers in the states to confront the coronavirus pandemic. Due recognition was to be given to the technical committees of the Ministry of Health for dealing with the technical aspects of the fight against the pandemic.

Economic measures

- An economic stimulus plan to be financed to the tune of \$120 million was announced.
- So far, the domestic private sector has pledged to contribute \$2 million to help the

government; the government reallocated \$3 million and UN and international partners are expected to donate \$9 million.

- The US government has also announced a donation of \$8 million, while the European Union announced a support package of EUR 70 Million.
- The Islamic Development Bank, on 9th of April, pledged to provide \$35 million to Sudan, while the World Bank has also announced a package of US\$ 35 Million from its Headquarters-based trust funds.
- To mitigate the negative impact on households and enterprises, especially on account of the curfews and lockdown meant to accelerate social distancing and flattening of the infection curve, the government considered boosting social safety net by increasing direct cash

transfers mostly to indigent households and individuals; to provide unemployment benefits, and; to deliver basic food baskets to poor families at discounted prices. These measures were estimated to cost about \$1.5 billion over three months.

- There are also reports from the Ministry of Health that 30 billion SDG (\$540.8M) have been allocated to prevent the collapse of the Sudanese health system and another 20 billion SDG (\$360.5M) to support the families affected by the lockdown measures in Khartoum.

Employment-related measures

- On April 15, the government announced a significant increase in the salaries of public sector employees.
- The Ministries of Social Development, Industry and Trade and Finance are helping

the poor and vulnerable families and alleviating the economic risks resulting from the restrictions imposed to contain the health crisis posed by the coronavirus.

Some observed gaps with the measures adopted

- The communication from the government to people was weak and not systematically done. This fueled the belief of the majority of Sudanese that the virus will not get to the country and will not infect the people. However, once the infection rates spiked in mid-April, people began to take more seriously the announced measures while the government also improved its communication strategy.
- The country is still operating in a pseudo military fashion. This accounts for the adoption of a command structure of communication and implementation. As a governance style, it deepens alienation and apathy, leading to many Sudanese being excluded as a result.
- Like other African countries, the capacities for testing, tracing of contact persons and treatment of infected persons are still low and grossly inadequate.
- Most Health Care Workers (HCWs) are lacking necessary and adequate Personal Protective Equipments (PPEs). Whilst HCWs are widely exposed to possible infection from the virus, there are no figures to ascertain how many HCWs have been infected.
- There is no evidence that the government is engaging and involving trade unions and employers association in COVID-19 prevention and containment actions. On the contrary, after the ousting of

General Al-Bashir, the Transitional Government has turned on trade unions and their leaders through sundry harassment and acts of intimidation.

Role of trade unions

As trade unions, particularly those grouped in the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation (SWTUF), struggle to find space to continue operating during this period of the Transitional Government of the Sudan, they can use the opportunities offered in the fight against the coronavirus to renew their relevance to the workers and people of the Sudan.

- Being active in the mobilization of workers and the public against COVID-19
 - Develop COVID-19 messages to share with workers and members of the trade unions. The messages should aid in the mobilization of the workers and people of Sudan against the virus. Reliable and credible media and platforms can be used to disseminate messages such as #StaySafe and "obey COVID-19 health advice". This can promote the visibility of the trade unions and show their commitment in the fight against the pandemic. It can also help to endear workers to the trade unions and benefit them organizationally.
- Sustain advocacy for human and labour rights
 - unions should continue to demand respect for the human and workers' rights enshrined in the Sudanese

national constitution, the African Union Human Rights and Democracy protection and promotion instruments, as well as the ILO Conventions that Sudan has ratified or is obliged to adhere to. Trade unions can document and report on human and trade union rights observance during the fight against COVID-19 in Sudan. Such reports can be made available for publishing in the ITUC Rights Survey and also through the annual reporting of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR).

- Provide support and solidarity to migrants and refugees – Sudan is a migration receiving, transit and sending country. Trade

unions are encouraged to provide safe haven/ sanctuary for migrants and refugees. They can collect food, materials and money to send to migrant and refugee camps as part of their support to ease the dire humanitarian situation that these vulnerable people and workers face.

- Engage in preparing workers for lockdown easing – So many countries have commenced easing of the lockdown measures imposed. The trade unions should be strategic in devising lockdown easing messages to workers that would improve their safety. Such messages can focus on the need to encourage workers to wear face masks and on how to properly wear and maintain them. Trade unions can

also create a hotline for workers to report risky and bad exposure to COVID-19 on account of the non-provision of PPEs, industrial relations issues such as non-payment of salaries or income cuts, etc.

- Monitoring of donations and aid given to government during COVID-19 – trade unions will do well to monitor the spending of COVID-19 funds. Being active and vigilant in the monitoring of these funds will contribute to enhancing the government's accountability and better distribution of the resources to reach the identified target groups.
- Develop own alternative post-COVID-19 economic recovery suggestions – Sudan is a country with a

long history of civil conflict and a recent revolution. COVID-19 is bound to deepen the fragilities and increase social tensions. Trade unions have a definite role in organizing and mobilizing workers to demand social dialogue as part of the process of recovery from both COVID-19 and the reconstruction following the revolution of 2019. Pushing for credible social dialogue requires that unions develop their key demands for economic and social measures that promote the employment needs of workers, secure incomes and provide their social protection. Unions must also consider developing necessary alliances that can strengthen their position in pushing for social dialogue. ITUC-Africa stands ready to

support the trade unions and workers of the Sudan as they struggle for the self-determination and progress of their country.

Mauritania : Facing the pandemic of COVID-19



Mauritania moved quickly to address the health crisis once COVID-19 reared its head in the country. As soon as the first case appeared on Friday March 13, 2020 the Mauritanian authorities began to implement measures to respond as best as possible to the pandemic. As of May 25, 2020, the country

had recorded 237 cases with 15 recoveries and 6 dead.

Measures of restriction

The coronavirus Task Force in Mauritania was established as an inter-ministerial committee under the leadership of the Prime Minister Ismail Bedda Cheikh Sidiya. The initial measures

taken ranged from the closure of harbours and airports to the limitation of access points to the country and later to the closure of the country's borders with Mali, Senegal and Morocco. Then there were quarantine measures for anyone coming from a country where the pandemic was raging and the introduction of a curfew from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. as well as the closing of restaurants and cafes.

The government also announced a ban on all gatherings and the closure of schools. From March 27, the great Friday prayer was suspended and overland transport was restricted. Military patrols were also deployed along the border with Senegal. To support these various measures, the Mauritanian government stepped up awareness and prevention actions coordinated by the Ministry of Health.

On April 1, the government secured the passage of a bill to apply Article 60 of the Mauritanian Constitution that allowed the government to assume emergency powers, for a limited time, to fight the pandemic. This decree gave the government the flexibility and required legal authority to consolidate the efforts undertaken since the appearance of the COVID-19 in the country.

Socio-economic incentives

The Head of State Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani announced the creation of a social solidarity fund endowed with 60 million US dollars from public resources and open to voluntary contributions to fight COVID-19 and its consequences. This fund was notably to be used for acquisition of medicines for poor families and to cover customs taxes for the rest of the year. Significantly, the management of the crisis in Mauritania has

been facilitated by recognizable support to the government by the private sector, particularly foreign companies in the country. An established collaborative framework led the Tasiast Company to equip an isolation center with 200 essential kits and make a house available to the government for the emergency isolation of detained travellers to prevent the spread of the virus. The Tasiast company also pledged to donate 2 million US dollars. Other companies such as "BP" donated 30 tonnes of medical instruments, hygiene products and masks as a contribution to the fight against COVID-19 through the NGO Pairs educators, their health partner.

For its part, the National Union of Mauritanian Employers announced on April 1 that they had collected nearly 111 million ouguiya (about 2,930,000 USD) as donations from companies such as Attijaribank

in favour of the government to fight the pandemic.

Trade Union actions

For the time being, Mauritanian trade union organizations have been carrying out local actions at their base. The unions have held awareness-raising actions on health measures, namely hand washing, wearing of masks and social distancing. They have done this with innovative means such as sketches in local languages.

The effectiveness of the measures and the mobilization of private sector actors have been reinforced by an awareness campaign carried out in all the provinces of the country, associating local administration, elected officials and NGOs in order to inform and reassure citizens about the measures taken and urge them to respect the health instructions. For its part, the Ministry of Health has been

communicating daily the number of confirmed cases, deaths, confined persons and reaches out through the Mauritanian Information Agency and different information platforms and social networks.

COVID-19 impact could be devastating in Malawi as Politics takes centre-stage



The COVID-19 pandemic reached Malawi in the context of a major political contestation and turmoil. In February, 2020 the country's constitutional court nullified the results of the disputed May 2019 presidential elections due to "severe irregularities". The judges ordered fresh elections

that were then scheduled for 2 July. Consequently, the response to the pandemic has been greatly influenced by the political context which is characterised by uncertainty and disorder. This is compounded by the fact that already President Peter Mutharika is perceived by many as a lame duck. Among

other things, the government's unilateral approach has allowed opposition parties to accuse it of playing politics ahead of the July elections.

Consequently when President Peter Mutharika announced a 21-day lockdown which was meant to begin on Saturday April 18 in a bid to contain the spread of the virus in the country, a Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC) grouping went to the high court to seek an injunction to stop the government from implementing the 21-day national lockdown due to coronavirus. This was in spite of Mutharika warning that up to 50,000 Malawians could lose their lives to the Covid-19 virus. The HRDC, however, argued that the President did not outline a social safety net for the vulnerable during the lockdown, an argument that influenced the country's High Court to block the coronavirus lockdown in a bid to

protect the poor.

Government's early measures

Already on March 20, 2020 the President of Malawi, Professor Peter Mutharika declared a state of disaster following the declaration by the World Health Organisation (WHO) of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020. The government then instituted measures to begin screening high-risk travelers entering Malawi. On April 2, 2020 the first three cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in Malawi. On 4 April, the President announced additional measures to support containment, increase the capacity of the health sector, and to mitigate risks for the economy. He also announced the setting up of structures to coordinate and lead the fight against the pandemic. These were:

- i. A Crisis Cabinet Committee on COVID-19, led by the Ministry of Health and the Disaster

Management Affairs and Public Events, which meets weekly to coordinate response measures to the pandemic.

ii. The National Disaster Preparedness and Relief Committee also continues to meet, and reviews recommendations from the cluster system.

iii. The setting up of a number of operational clusters to cover various aspects connected to responding to the crisis. The work of the different clusters fed into the National Plan.

Other measures announced included:

i. Communication:

- Intensified civic education and information sharing by government authorities with communities.

- Risk communication tools developed by the Health Education Unit, including posters, jingles and leaflets.

- Ministry of Health developed an app to track patients and suspects to ensure compliance with national guidelines.

- Media updates, press releases and dissemination of information through social media.

ii. Travel and Transport Sector

- Wide-ranging restrictions on public transport were introduced by the Ministry of Transport but full enforcement, particularly in relation to minibuses, remains challenging.

- All cross-border passenger travel was suspended from

- 1st April 2020 including suspension of all international flights except those carrying health personnel, equipment, emergency relief items, returning residents and general cargo.
- . To reduce the impact of restrictions imposed on the transport industry, the Malawi Energy Regulatory Authority Board reduced prices from 4 April, 2020 - diesel 13.75%, petrol 16.13% and paraffin 9.71%.
- . For the private and other sectors, the heads of institutions were to liaise with the Secretary responsible for Labour.
- . All places, buildings and structures with public access were to ensure that there was adequate ventilation.
- . All employers were to allow vulnerable employees, including those with underlying medical conditions, to work from or stay at home.

iii. Decongestion of workplaces

- . To decongest workplaces, all offices were to work in shifts except those delivering essential services.
- . For the public sector, the Chief Secretary to the Government was to issue a circular to provide guidelines.

iv. Screening and Quarantining

- . The requirement for self or institutional quarantine for 14 days for all residents and nationals returning from affected countries was instituted. Those with symptoms had samples being taken in their homes.

- Contact tracing of all individuals that came into contact with confirmed cases;
- Intensified screening of people at all entry points and surveillance of travellers from countries with confirmed cases.
- All district hospitals were required to reserve rooms/spaces for treatment of confirmed cases.
- Work was started on treatment spaces at border districts and central hospitals;
- Training for health care workers and community health workers was set in motion.
- Provision of Personal Protective Equipment for all personnel at risk of contracting

the disease, especially health care workers, was announced by the State President on 4 April.

Other measures to save the economy and protect the citizens

Measures were also announced aimed at mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 on the economy, vulnerable households and workers, as many live below the poverty line.

Among them:

- i. Fuel prices be reduced in tandem with international declining price trends.
- ii. The Reserve Bank adjusted the liquidity reserve ratio by 125 basis points to 3.75 percent, thereby immediately freeing K12 billion (approx. USD16.3 million) for commercial banks to make available for lending to

their customers.

iii. Reduction of fees and charges on all electronic money transactions in order to promote use of electronic money transactions.

iv. The Malawi Revenue Authority has been instructed to open a voluntary tax compliance window for a period of six months to allow taxpayers with arrears to settle their tax obligations in instalments without penalty.

v. Tax waivers on importation of essential goods for Coronavirus management including personal protective equipment, hand sanitizers, soaps, water treatment chemicals and many more;

vi. Malawi Enterprise Development Fund to increase loan allocation from K13 billion to K15 billion to help Micro,

Small and Medium Scale businesses seriously affected by the pandemic;

vii. A 50% increased nutrition allowance payable to civil servants with foundational medical conditions.

viii. Employment of additional 1,700 health care workers.

The President also announced government readiness to make cash payments to support the poor and to persuade vendors to close shops during a proposed lockdown. A minimum of 172,000 households, representing an estimated 35 percent of the urban population was to be targeted, with payment to each of K35,000 per month based on the prevailing government minimum wage rate. However, the lockdown was challenged in court and prevented from coming into effect.

The role of trades union in Malawi in fighting COVID 19

Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) has played a cardinal role in the fight against COVID 19 in the country. The MCTU expressed early support for the measures instituted by government for dealing with the pandemic. The union called on workers to observe the guidelines spelt out by the Ministry of Health for containing and preventing the spread of the virus. The MCTU went on to urge employers to pay particular attention to the safety and health of workers and urgently demanded increased risk allowances for health workers. It also requested of employers with more than 100 employees to introduce a shift system to reduce congestion at workplaces.

The MCTU has further been

insistent on the need for social dialogue and collective bargaining with employers and government in dealing with the issues of COVID-19. This prompted the Ministry of Labour to call for a tripartite meeting.

The union's three initial demands were:

- i. That government protects the employees against arbitrary pay cuts.
- ii. That government protects workers against unnecessary job losses.
- iii. That government institutes social protection measures for low-income earning employees and those in the informal sector. Noting that Malawi's minimum wage is not a living wage – pegged

at MK35,000 (US\$47) – MCTU proposed that those earning MK100,000 and below should not be subjected to income tax.

The union went on to gather information regarding the abuse of workers' rights in the face of the pandemic. It noted that most employers, especially in the hospitality and tourism industry, were wantonly laying off their workers without due process and social dialogue. It estimated conservatively that 35 000 workers in the hospitality industry (touted as one of the main sectors that boosts Malawi's economy) had lost their jobs due to the COVID-19. Again, companies that rely on imported raw materials from China and other countries had also halted their production as they were unable to secure such material.

Information gathered also indicated that women were hardest hit because they constituted a larger percentage of low-cadre workers. It also became evident that the laying off of workers had a discriminatory trend with largely the lower cadre of workers being affected. Further, it was found that workers who were not unionised were disproportionately affected with lay-offs. In such instances, the MCTU estimates that between 50 to 80% of the workers had lost their jobs with those remaining experiencing pay cuts. On Labour Day the Minister of Labour estimated that Malawi could lose up to 1.5 million jobs due to the pandemic.

MCTU has made important contribution towards developing the guidelines for

dealing with the COVID-19 that were adopted by the third tripartite committee. One of the key recommendations was that in the event of a lockdown, the agriculture sector as the backbone of Malawi's economy should be allowed to function under strict guidelines, especially in tobacco, sugar and tea industries, so as to avert the suffocation of the economy. MCTU also recommended

that the frontline cadre who are at high risk should withdraw from unsafe work environment. This led to the quick supply of PPEs in most work places. It is impressive that the vigilant role played by the MCTU has earned it a place on the Presidential task force on COVID 19. This means the trade unions shall be included in the technical working groups.

Misallocation of the funds:

Malawi's government has come under pressure to account for its coronavirus response spending. The government has allocated 2.5 billion kwacha (\$3.4 million) to its response and received external support such as an immediate \$7 million from the World Bank and \$2.2 million from the UK. Yet health workers have held protests to draw attention to dire shortages of

personal protective equipment (PPEs) in hospitals.

The peculiar political situation of Malawi has made it difficult for the country to unite the population behind the common threat that faces them. This has also meant a divided attention between COVID-19 response and a forthcoming presidential elections. Hot politicking and political rallies that bring together

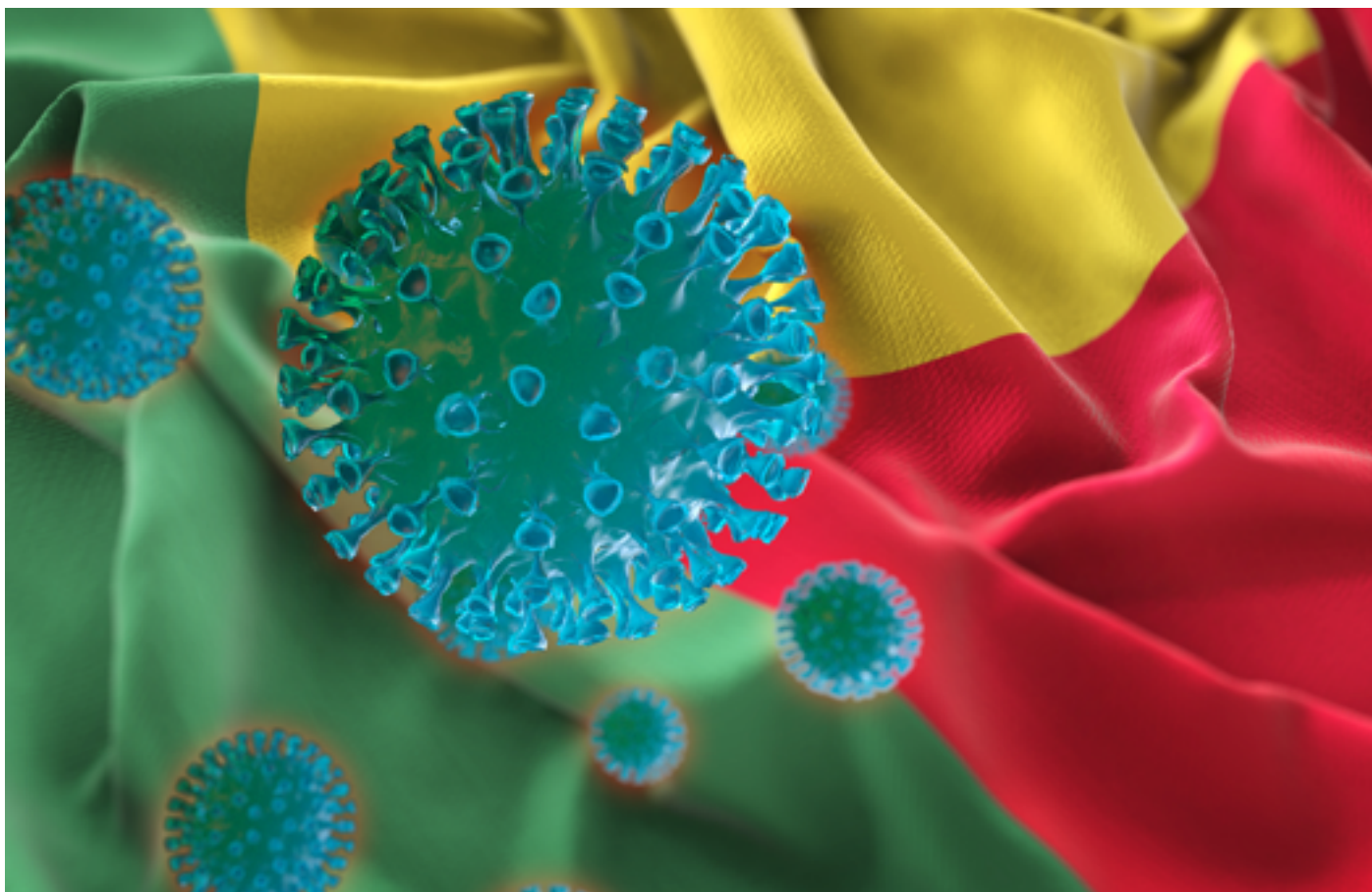
huge numbers of people are being held when large gatherings have been restricted in virtually all other countries of the world as one of the ways of avoiding crowding together of people to achieve social distancing. The exigencies of politics appear to have overridden the demands of public health and represents a big compromise in the fight against the virus.

As of May 20, 2020, Malawi had 71 confirmed cases with 27 recoveries and 3 deaths. The growing numbers of confirmed cases in Malawi and elsewhere in Africa suggests that the pandemic has not reached its peak on the continent. Even more complicated for Malawi is the way politics has undermined the fight against the pandemic. The union's role so far has been commendable. The MCTU will do well for workers and itself by staying the course in the demand for continuing social dialogue in addressing the issues arising

from the pandemic. The issues of safety and health for workers, saving jobs and incomes as well as making social protection for all must continue to receive the attention of the tripartite committee.

The union's role so far that has brought it to the center of the COVID-19 response should also help it to renew its effort at organising workers. Beyond that the union should also strengthen its resolve to join effort for a new social contract between the people and the ruling elite, a contract that places employment, incomes, social protection and quality public services for all at the heart of national socio-economic policies. MCTU must rise up to its responsibility as a faithful representative of the working people in this time of great public need.

Benin and the fight against **COVID-19**



The COVID-19 pandemic that continues to shake the world has affected almost every country in Africa. The disease has put a strain on livelihoods and economies. In the case of Benin several economic activities in both the formal and informal economies have been slowed down or suspended

altogether. The measures taken by the authorities in Benin, despite their usefulness and effectiveness, have created enormous difficulties for many sectors, particularly transport, hotels, tourism and especially the informal economy in which the majority of the population work.

From March 16, 2020, when the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Benin, the number of cases has risen over the last two months as in neighbouring countries. As of May 17, 2020, the country had recorded 339 confirmed cases with 83 recoveries and 2 deaths.

Government's response to COVID-19

The measures taken by the government included demanding the wearing of protective masks and mandatory social distancing of 1 meter between persons everywhere. The other measures were:

- Limiting entry and exit at the country's land borders to what was absolutely necessary. Only essential crossings was to be authorised in liaison with the authorities of neighbouring countries.
- Systematic and compulsory quarantine for 14 days of any person arriving in Benin. The quarantine costs for nationals would be covered by the State, while non-nationals would bear their own costs.
- Suspension of all official missions outside the country, except in cases of absolute urgency.
- Establishment of a cordon sanitaire around 12 towns and localities in the south and east of the country, including Cotonou, Porto-Novo, Calavi, and Ouidah.
- Closure of bars, discos, churches, mosques and other places of worship, beaches and other places of entertainment.
- Obligation for banks, supermarkets, bar-restaurants, businesses and other establishments open to

the public to provide protective and hygienic measures and to ensure that customers and users respect the health safety distance between them.

- Supply and sale of subsidised protective masks by the government.
- Ban on buses and public transport.
- Limiting the number of passengers on board a taxi to a maximum of three (03) for 5-seater vehicles and a maximum of five (5) for 7-seater vehicles.
- Traffic authorisation for goods transport vehicles.
- Prohibition of gatherings of more than fifty (50) peoples.
- Authorisation for non-festive gatherings and burial ceremonies involving no more

than fifty (50) people

- Anticipation of Easter holidays with closure of schools from 30 March.

Both the employers' and workers' organisations welcomed the measures by government and expressed their congratulations. The measures were deemed to have taken account of the reality of Benin, particularly the predominance of the informal economy. Two major factors deplored though, were, (i) the fact that there had been no specific social dialogue with employers' or workers' trade union organisations; and (ii) no specific economic or social measures to support enterprises or guarantee incomes or jobs were announced.

Involvement of trade unions in the fight against COVID-19

Despite the manifest will of

the trade unions to part of the fight against COVID-19, the government has not called any formal meeting with them to date. This notwithstanding, the unions have stepped up their own actions and initiatives.

Awareness-raising and communication actions have been undertaken in various ways - through radio, television, discussion forums and social media - to inform the population and workers about the coronavirus and the need for compliance with the measures taken by the authorities.

The six trade union confederations that signed the charter of unity for trade union action in Benin, namely, the Central Trade Union of Private Parapublic and Informal Sectors of Benin (CSPIB), the General Confederation of Benin Workers (CGTB), the National Union of Benin Workers' Unions (UNSTB), the Confederation

of Independent Trade Union Organizations of Benin (COSI-Benin), the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Benin (CSA-BENIN) and the United Trade Union Center of Benin (CSUB), issued three declarations at different times to make proposals to the government. It was in fact the trade unions that demanded the closure of schools in March.

The trade union confederations working together requested and obtained a meeting with the employers' association and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Benin. After three days of discussion, the two parties (employers and unions) signed a joint memorandum which was sent to the government in April 2020.

The recommendations in the Memorandum can be grouped into two categories:

- Recommendations for mitigating the effects of the crisis, namely, economic

measures to support the most affected enterprises; and social protection measures for workers.

- Recommendations for economic stimulus measures. Regarding the reopening of schools, the trade union confederations also met with the parents of pupils with a view to taking action that would facilitate the resumption of classes. Following an official communication from the Government confirming the resumption of classes on May 11, 2020, the Federation of Trade Unions for Education, Culture, Youth and Allied Workers (FéSECJA), in a statement dated 27 April 2020, called on the Government to publicise the measures taken with the view to reassuring all actors in the education system in Benin. It is noteworthy that the unions declined an invitation to meet with the ministers in charge of education for a meeting

scheduled for Thursday, May 14, 2020. They considered such a meeting superfluous since Government had already exercised the option of reopening classes from May 11 without prior discussion with any of the various education stakeholders.

Benin has taken definite steps towards easing the restrictions that were initially instituted to fight COVID-19. Screening and tests of teachers were stepped up as part of the preparation towards reopening of schools that already occurred on May 11. The further removal of restrictions means that people would be expected undertake economic activities and go about earning their livelihoods while at the same time coping with the continuing existence of the deadly coronavirus. This would require that various health protocols that prevent the spread of the virus should be maintained and particular effort also made to keep the world of work safe.

This demands commitment from various social actors and the self motivation of different sections of the population to do things differently, especially with regards to respecting social distancing and observing the various public hygiene protocols like regular washing of hand with soap and using hand sanitizers. The room for unions to engage in social dialogue will be essential for making workplaces

safer and for eliciting voluntary cooperation of workers towards doing what is necessary to achieve the new normal. Trade union advocacy is also going to be necessary in directing public investments into public health and other quality public services as well as social protection for working people and the vulnerable sections of the society.

COVID-19 worsens already difficult conditions for the working people of Angola



Angola confirmed its first two positive cases of COVID-19 on 21st March, 2020. Both were imported cases from Portugal. As elsewhere in most of Africa, the Government of Angola quickly adopted a number of measures with the view to containing the spread of the virus and preventing it from spreading widely within

the population.

Measures of restriction

The Government of Angola declared a State of Emergency initially for 15 days subject to renewal and imposed a number of restrictions. These included:

Closure of educational

institutions

Ban on entry or exiting the country, with exemptions for cargo.

Restriction on movements between provinces within the country.

Suspension of public services with the exception of essential services such as hospitals and pharmacies.

Prohibition of meetings comprising more than 50 persons.

Prohibition of all leisure, recreational and religious gatherings.

Commercial activity to be closed with the exception of essential supplies such as food, banks, media, hotels, takeaway food, gas stations.

Industrial and agriculture to remain closed with the exception, among others, of food and beverage production, essential health products, oil industry and oilfield service providers, and

mining.

Government also pronounced some labour protection rules whereby certain groups of people who were at risk and needed to be released from working at their usual working site were not to be dismissed by employers due to their absence at work.

The State of Emergency was renewed two times till May 10, 2020, before Government began to slowly relax the restrictions. Meanwhile on April 10, 257 Cuban doctors arrived in Angola to help with the fight against COVID-19.

As of May 14, 2020, the number of confirmed cases in Angola stood at 45 with 14 recoveries and 2 deaths.

Visible Impacts on Workers

Angola has seen a sharp rise in prices of food products and

essential commodities since the enactment of measures to contain and prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Many workers have, thus, found it extremely difficult to cater for themselves and their families.

Even though the wages of workers in general were supposed to be protected by the Presidential Decree that was issued as part of the declaration of State of Emergency, in practice, many employers have not adhered to the Decree. Reports indicate that many workers have received notification of termination of contracts. A number of workers in the hospitality sector have gone without wages since restrictions were announced. Employers cite lack of resources for their inability to pay wages.

In the private education sector, proprietors have demanded the payment of 60% of tuition from

students even though classes had been suspended since March.

Meanwhile within communities, shortages of potable water for drinking and for maintaining basic hygiene has negatively affected the fight against the coronavirus.

Again, people who tested positive for COVID-19 have also suffered discrimination and stigmatization.

Trade Unions and their role

Government responses and interventions have been formulated without consultation with unions, in spite of the impacts the measures have had on workers.

Thus far, trade unions have been faced with a major challenge of financing because payment of union dues has fallen drastically. Most trade unions offices have been closed. A Confederation like the National Union of Angolan Workers (UNTA), has had to set up a daily rotating work schedule with two employees and a manager.

Reports from union officials indicate that teleworking or working virtually is hardly possible because of the high cost of internet connectivity in the country. Statistics show that the monthly cost of internet data is equal to or higher than four times the national minimum wage in Angola.

By and large, social distancing measures are being practiced

by all union members in line with the prohibition against public gatherings under the State of Emergency.

The difficulties of union work notwithstanding, three national trade union centres led by UNTA have tried to work together in the fight against COVID-19. On 1st of May, 2020, during the commemoration of International Workers Day, the organizations released a joint statement calling for the safety and protection of workers, maintenance of jobs, protection of workers' rights and improvement in social dialogue.

UNTA has further produced educational videos on COVID-19 health protocols to sensitize its members and the public through social media

platforms. This is in addition to several appearances by union officials in television and radio discussions to voice out the concerns and needs of workers during the period of restrictions. Some of the unions affiliated to UNTA have also been involved in providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) to hospitals and protective gear for workers in the informal sector. A number of local unions

have also signed agreements with employers to ensure the retention of jobs during this period.

To date, there has been no tripartite session to address issues pertaining to COVID-19. Employers and workers have had separate meetings to address employment issues in the light of COVID-19.

While the Angolan Government appears to have adopted a fair number of measures around restrictions of movement of persons to contain the spread of the virus, there is little evidence that these measures have been accompanied by adequate social provisions to alleviate the burden of the crises on working people and the most vulnerable in society.

Angola's capital, Luanda, ranks as one of the most expensive cities in the world. However around half of the Angola population lives on less than \$2 a day. Thus, the restrictions imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus without the benefit of accompanying social measures could only have meant more hardship for the majority of Angola's people.

The country has recorded high economic growth rates following years of oil boom. But this growth has not been accompanied by investments in needed public services like public health, education and other social services and has only led to huge economic inequalities over the years. The absence of adequate potable water nationwide has been the most telling index of the social deprivation in Angola during the health crisis.

Again, the absence of Government consultation with relevant key stakeholders such as trade unions and employers in the formulation of policy interventions in the face of a national emergency like the public health crisis posed by the

coronavirus pandemic is a major cause for worry.

Like other unions in Africa and elsewhere in the world, the unions of Angola have to become more demanding in the bid to influence the changing world that is bound to emerge out of the COVID-19 pandemic. As our countries begin to move away from restrictions and to define a new normal in our economic and social lives, unions must intensify efforts to put occupational safety and health for workers, living wages and social protection at the top of the agenda of economic and social policies for our countries. We must resolve to fight harder going forward!

Mali's response to the **COVID-19** pandemic



Already plagued by insecurity arising from terrorist attacks since 2012, Mali has been further destabilized by the COVID-19 health crisis. Since March 25, 2020 when the first two cases (two Malians who returned from France in mid-March) of the coronavirus were confirmed,

the numbers have continued to rise steadily.

As of May 16, 2020, there were 806 confirmed cases with 46 deaths and 455 recoveries.

Government's strategic responses to the pandemic

Even before the appearance of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Mali, the government constituted a Defence Council presided over by the President to respond to the threat of the pandemic. On March 11, 2020, the country was put on high alert through the announcement of a number of measures of restriction listed below. Once the first two cases were recorded, the measures were reinforced with a curfew from 9pm to 5am on March 26, 2020 and the closure of all educational institutions. Measures were also announced to mitigate the impact of the restrictions on the economy and livelihoods.

Measures of Restriction

1. All travelers who presented themselves in Mali would receive at the points of entry (air and land) a systematic temperature measurement, as well as the recommendations of the government relating to:

(i) common barrier measures (hand-washing with water and soap, use of hydro-alcoholic gel, respect for social distance of 1 meter; wearing of masks; (ii) self-isolation measures; (iii) the provision of a toll-free number (36061) to the population for all practical purposes.

2. Travellers arriving from countries severely affected by COVID-19 with a symptom of fever (temperature above 37.5-degree Celsius) but no sign of respiratory difficulty will be directed into self-isolation for 14 days, and will be subject to daily monitoring by a medical team.

3. Travelers from countries severely affected by Covid-19 with major symptoms such as fever (temperature above 37.5-degree Celsius) and signs of respiratory difficulty will be admitted to one of the isolation sites, created for this purpose,

to be tested and if necessary, treated.

4. Reduction to a maximum of 50 persons for public and social gatherings and respect for social distance during social events such as baptisms, funerals, weddings, etc.

5. Suspension of the participation of Malian government officials in big meetings or fora in highly affected countries.

6. Suspension of the holding of major gatherings in Mali (Conferences, symposia, festivals, etc.) until further notice.

7. Reinforcement of individual and collective hygiene measures (hand washing with soap, use of hydro-alcoholic gel in front of all public services, private sector companies and places of

worship).

8. Prohibition of handshaking and embraces in all places and circumstances and disinfection of the big market of Bamako and bus stations to mitigate the risk of spreading the virus.

9. With regard to patient care, people tested positive with COVID-19 would be taken care of in the sites selected by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

10. Given the presence of a large number of foreign forces, close coordination is essential with embassies, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Operation Barkhane, the European Union Training Mission, and International Organizations, for prevention and case management.

Socioeconomic measures

In his third message to the nation on the COVID-19 on April 10, 2020, the President of Mali announced a number of socio-economic measures, including:

- Endowment of a budget of 500 billion FCFA (approx. USD 825 million) as a fund to support the national economy and the most vulnerable households.
- The most vulnerable households would benefit from a special fund of 100 billion FCFA (USD 165 million) and a distribution of 56 thousand tonnes of cereals.
- Support for water and electricity bills for two months (April and May 2020) for those belonging to the most deprived social groups.
- Importers will benefit from

a reduction in customs duties on basic necessities.

- regarding the slowdown in economic activity and the resulting shortfall, particularly in the private sector, 20 billion CFA francs (USD 33 million) would be mobilised through the banks to support them.

Members of the government committed to forfeit their salaries as contribution to the national funds to combat the COVID-19 - 3 months for the President, 2 months for the Prime Minister and 1 month for Ministers.

It is to be noted that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved the disbursement of 120 billion FCFA (approx. USD198 million) in favour of Mali under the rapid credit facility to help the country meet urgent funding needs

resulting from the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic. This disbursement was to help support urgent health spending and the announced support to affected businesses and households.

Within the framework of bilateral cooperation between Mali and the United Arab Emirates, the Malian Government received on May 10, 2020, a large batch of sanitary materials as solidarity support in the fight against COVID-19. Estimated at around 10 tonnes of sanitary equipment, this Emirati donation consists of 300,000 gloves, 32,000 shoe covers, 20,000 surgical masks, 6000 hydrogels, 3,600 wipes, and 5,000 test kits for the COVID-19.

Trade union actions

The unions have been very active in conducting awareness campaigns among their

members to secure compliance with hygienic and preventive measures taken by the authorities against the disease. They can strengthen this work of awareness raising and link it with the campaign for improved public health by reaching out to artists, youth organizations and NGOs who have also been active in the fight against COVID-19.

The four (4) national trade union centers in Mali, National Union of Workers of Mali (UNTM), Trade Union Confederation of Workers of Mali (CSTM), Democratic Union of Workers of Mali (CDTM) and Malian Confederation of Labour (CMT) have been represented in a special tripartite commission set up by the Ministry of Social Dialogue, Labour and the Public Service within the framework of the national response against COVID-19. This commission, created on April 23, 2020, was responsible in particular for:

(i) Collecting and analysing information on the situation of the sectors of activity particularly impacted by corona virus epidemic;

(ii) Collect and analyze statistical data on the employment situation (number of employees placed on technical unemployment by activity sector, dismissals for economic reasons operated, etc.);

(iii) Evaluate the effectiveness of the measures following the pandemic on working conditions and the operation of businesses;

(iv) Ensure operational monitoring for the day-to-day management of alerts from companies or workers' unions;

(v) Propose prevention and management measures to the Government, employers and workers (legislative

and regulatory reforms, social measures, and other support intended to limit the consequences of the epidemic, and / or facilitate the resumption of the economic activity) ;

(vi) Make a regular report of its work to the Minister in charge of Labour and the Public Service.

The establishment of this commission is an opportunity for the Malian unions to measure the impact of the pandemic on workers and the world of work in order to make their contributions to the well-being of workers as well as to recovery efforts after the pandemic.

The slowdown in economic activity occasioned by the crisis of COVID-19 crisis has led to the suspension of employment contracts and technical layoffs in a number of companies, especially private ones. This is

an important matter that the unions are expected to raise so that greater effort can be made to provide support to the workers whose livelihoods are threatened.

On May 8, 2020, the government lifted the curfew that was imposed on the country at the beginning of the crisis. Schools are scheduled to reopen on June 02, 2020. This is indication that the heavy restrictions that were initially instituted to contain the virus and prevent its rapid spread are being eased. What is not clear, however, is the new normal that Mali or any African country can assume, particularly with the continuing presence of the coronavirus within national borders and the absence of a certified cure or vaccine for the COVID-19.

What seems evident is that governments and populations are gearing up to carry on

with economic activities and livelihoods alongside fighting the coronavirus. This new situation demands greater resilience, innovation and purposiveness from all, including trade unions, if we are to weather it successfully. Our unions must see greater value in uniting their efforts to allow them to give greater voice and better representation to workers in order to secure their jobs, their safety and their social protection during this period of crisis.

Furthermore, unions also need to unite their efforts to ensure that they can develop common positions and plans that can feed into the national efforts at recovery and the sustainable development out of the crisis. Trade unions are challenged to reinvent themselves to remain relevant for securing workers rights and interests going forward.

Mauritius - An African tourist destination responds to the disruption of **COVID-19**



Mauritius is a tourism destination island nation of 1.2 million people. The coronavirus entered the island on the 18th March, 2020. As of May 14, 2020, the country had recorded 332 confirmed cases with 322 recoveries and 10 deaths.

The government of Prime Minister Pravin Jugnauth rightly likened the emergence of the pandemic to a “war situation” and announced measures to rein in the virus and also to alleviate the impact of the crisis on the people.

Public health measures

10 weeks lockdown from 20th March to the 4th of May 2020. The lockdown was extended to the 1st of June 2020. The easing of the lockdown for some economic sectors to resume operations is foreseen for the 15th of May 2020 when workers of those sectors will be issued Access Permit.

The lockdown involved closure of the airport and seaports; closure of schools; imposition of curfew; restriction on movement of persons; quarantine of persons from countries with the coronavirus (over 2,000 people quarantined in government facilities and private hotels); testing and contact tracing (identifying persons who had contact with infected persons), and treatment. The measures were meant to achieve social distancing and prevent the spread of the virus.

In furtherance of social distancing, for people to get

supplies of essential goods and services while the lockdown remained, they were allowed to shop on allocated days depending on the first letter of their surname. This means that those whose surnames begin with A-F shop on Monday and Thursday, G-N on Tuesday and Friday and O-Z on Wednesday and Saturday. The shops are closed on Sunday.

Tax measures

- To promote working from home, the Government introduced a tax reduction scheme which gives employers a double tax deduction in respect of emoluments payable to its staff who work from home and a 5% tax credit on the acquisition of information technology system. These measures are available through to 30 June 2020.
- Companies may also be eligible for certain enhanced

tax deductions for plant and machinery acquired during the period 1 March 2020 through 30 June 2020.

Electricity consumption rates have also been reduced for low-income groups and small businesses.

Economic stimulus measures

- The Central Bank provided households impacted by COVID-19 a moratorium of six (6) months on capital repayments of their existing household loans as from the 1st of April 2020. Low-income groups will have the Bank of Mauritius bear the interest payable on outstanding household credits with commercial banks up to June 2020.
- The Bank of Mauritius removed shared ATM fees and continued to maintain an adequate supply of banknotes to commercial banks for their ATMs.
- Non-renewal of road taxes and vehicle insurance not be enforced for one month.

- The BOM has initiated a USD/MUR swap arrangement with commercial banks for an initial amount of USD100 million to enable commercial banks to support import-oriented businesses, except for the State Trading Corporation which will be dealing directly with the Bank of Mauritius for its foreign currency requirements until further notice.

Employment-related measures

The employment measures were fashioned out with consideration for the Worker's Rights Act of 2019.

- Both public and private sector establishments were encouraged to allow their workers, especially non-

essential services providers to work from home.

- COVID-19 Work Access Permits were issued to key persons of all organizations who need access to their places of work.
- Workers are not to be forced to work. For essential services workers, the employers must provide them with Personal Protective Equipment.
- Workers are not supposed to experience wage cuts during the COVID-19 containment period. Any company unable to meet its wage bill can apply for Wage Assistance subsidy. This wage subsidy helps to alleviate the employee cost for March ranging from 15 days basic wage bill to MUR 12,500 (approx. USD 312) per employee.
- Workers from the informal sector, especially self-

employed not registered with the revenue authority were promised 50% of the prevailing minimum wage if they registered (online) with the revenue authority during the COVID-19 lockdown.

- Government to allow employees who become technically unemployed temporarily due to the crisis to access the Priority Sectors' Assistance facility. Those who qualified are workers in the travel and tourism sector, export-oriented enterprises, ICT/BPO sector, SMEs and other sectors of the economy that can show relevant contributions to the nation's revenue creation base.

Some gaps in the nation's COVID-19 containment measures

Some companies that engaged migrant workers did little to pay them their wages and to

provide them with PPE. The instances negate the pledge by the government to ensure that no worker suffers wage loss.

Some of the gaps in the measures adopted include

- Blanket access to the tax and fiscal stimulus provided by the government did not only favor the needy but provided also for the greedy.
- As workers, trade unions and government were busy struggling to contain the virus, a section of the organised business community was busy making moves to undermine the Worker's Rights Act of 2019 under the pretext that its provisions would contribute to the collapse of businesses.
- So far, there have been no social dialogue processes to allow for consultation and common engagement in the fight against the COVID-19.

Trade union contributions to the COVID-19 containment and their way forward

The trade unions have been active in getting their members and the general public to focus on ensuring that everyone stays safe and alive by heeding official health advice and respecting measures announced. This has been done mainly through social media based communication.

Social media and internet have also been used in an interactive manner with union members. These media have been used to compile grievances arising from working from home (WFH) arrangements. Some such grievances have been heavier workloads sent at odd hours; inadequate internet facilities to undertake tasks; and even unannounced home visits by supervisors that violate worker's privacy, family and social life.

Mauritius trade unions appear to have come to terms with the fact WFH is an emerging reality of the world of work and is bound to become popular going forward. They have already developed union positions that they would want employers and government to consider and take into account for the relevant legislation.

The unions also appear ready to pursue their interest in amendments to the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2005 that would include new provisions for workers' access to hygienic facilities at workplaces.

It is also impressive that Mauritius trade unions have been vigilant and active in protecting the human and labour rights of workers, including non-unionized and migrant workers. An instance is the solidarity gesture of the Construction Workers' Union of

Mauritius (CMWEU) and CTSP who came to the aid of 144 unpaid Indian migrant workers employed by Swadeshi Pvt Ltd, an Indian construction company in Mauritius. The workers were vulnerable to COVID-19 as they complained of not being provided with PPEs to protect themselves. In response, the unions distributed hygiene packs to the workers on the 17th of April 2020.

Trade unions in Mauritius have made good effort during this period of crisis that they must consolidate and build upon. Greater cohesion among the various national trade union centers and renewed effort at working together can only strengthen the unity of workers and their possibility to exert more influence on the direction of national economic and social policies. The challenges of survival for workers under the COVID-19 crisis and the demands of recovery after will

require stronger organisation and representation of the workers. Trade union leaders of today should live up to their responsibilities and respond to the urgent need to put up the united front that is needed to protect workers' rights in a sustainable manner and ensure that our countries can make the necessary progress that would benefit all the peoples.

Niger – even more vulnerable with the **COVID-19** crisis



Located in the heart of the Sahel, Niger has a non-diversified economy, essentially dependent on agriculture (40% of the GDP). Despite the great progress made by the country over the last decade in reducing its poverty rate, the level of extreme poverty remained very high at 41.4% in

2019, affecting more than 9.5 million people out of a total population of about 24 million. Niger is already experiencing a crisis with its increasingly deteriorating security situation, especially in the border areas with Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali, where armed groups have established bases and carry on

attacks against security forces and civilians.

The coronavirus health crisis came in to exacerbate the already precarious situation of Niger's people. From the first confirmed case of COVID-19 on March 19, 2020, the recorded number of confirmed cases as of May 16, 2020 stood at 885 with 51 deaths and 684 recoveries. The Minister of Employment, Labour and Social Protection of the country is reported to have been one of the casualties of the COVID-19 pandemic on May 3, 2020.

Niger Government's response to COVID-19

The Government of Niger took a series of measures in response to the threat and arrival of COVID-19 in the country. The measures can be listed under safety and health, operational as well as economic and social.

Safety and health measures:

- . Proclamation of a state of health emergency throughout the national territory.
- . Establishment in Niamey, the only city affected by the virus, of a curfew from 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. and its sanitary isolation from the rest of the country.
- . Closure of the international airports in Niamey and Zinder as well as all land borders.
- . Consultation between the government and religious leaders to decide on measures relating to access to places of worship.
- . Closure of all educational institutions.
- . Closing of bars, nightclubs, cinemas and other places of

entertainment.

- Prohibition of any gathering of more than 50 people.
- Establishment of compulsory hygiene measures in markets, shops, restaurants, public and private services.
- Respect for a distance of at least one meter between people in supermarkets, restaurants, businesses and other public places
- Free diagnosis and treatment of any confirmed cases.
- Active search for suspicious cases and strengthening of tests, particularly through the multiplication and fitting out of test centers.

Operational measures

These included:

- the adoption of a treatment protocol coupled with the increase in hospital reception and resuscitation capacities;
- the strengthening of the protection of health personnel;
- increased containment capacity for suspected cases;
- recruitment of 1,500 additional health workers.

Working hours in the public services were also readjusted to commence from 08h00 to 14h00 continuously from Monday to Friday.

Economic and social measures

At this level, the following measures were announced:

- Exemption from duties and

- taxes on all products which fall within the scope of the fight against COVID-19 (masks, hydro alcoholic gel etc.)
- Extension from 15 to 90 days, subject to a bank guarantee, the payment of custom duties after imported goods have been cleared.
- Postponement of the date of sticker payment for vehicles (road worthy certificate) from March 31 to the end of June, 2020.
- Suspension of on-site tax audits for two (2) months from April 1, 2020.
- Exemption from VAT on interurban land transport for the entire period of suspension of the activity and postponement to May 1 instead of March 31 of payment of the synthetic tax.
- In the hotel sector: application of a reduced rate of 10% in terms of VAT as provided for by WAEMU directives, application of an amortization rate of 5% instead of 2% and exemption of the minimum tax flat rate for the 2019 financial year.
- Suspension of the proceedings in tax collection for three (3) months for travel agencies and two (2) months for bars and spots as well as for sports and leisure entities;
- Consultation with economic operators and, if necessary, control of prices to contain the inflation.
- Increase of 340 billion FCFA (about 560 million USD) in the volume of liquidity injected by the BCEAO each week into the money market in favour of banks, bringing it to 4 750

billion FCFA (about 8 billion USD).

- Broadening of access to refinancing to the effects of an additional 1,700 companies.

At the social level, the following measures are noted:

- State support for electricity and water bills for vulnerable social groups for April and May;
- reinforcement of the annual support plan to support vulnerable people: (free distribution, sale at moderate price, etc.)
- graceful remission of sentences in favour of 1,540 detainees on humanitarian reasons and for relieving congestion in prisons.

CFA francs (\$ 1 billion)., Niger's response plan to COVID-19 is ultimately estimated at more than 1,400 billion CFA francs (\$ 2.3 billion).

Incidentally, Niger in addition to being among the 19 African countries that have benefited from the IMF debt reduction has also benefited from an emergency support fund to deal with the pandemic. This IMF donation is estimated at around 70 billion CFA francs (\$ 114 millions).

Originally evaluated at 597 billion

Trade union role

Trade union organisations in Niger have through social and public media contributed to raise public awareness about the COVID-19 and the measures for combatting the spread of the virus proposed by the health authorities. The unions have also drawn attention safety and health conditions at work after visiting some workplaces and have advocated for better safety at work. In some instances, unions have made donations of personal protective equipment and sanitizers to workplaces.

It is disturbing, however, that during this period when

all effort should be made to achieve cooperation among the social partners, violation of workers' right to organize and to express themselves led to tension between some unions and the authorities in Niger.

A closing of ranks among the different unions in Niger will place them in a stronger position to advocate for the protection of workers, the majority of who face real threat from the difficulties that are emerging from the negative impact the coronavirus. Unions must work together to gather systematic information about

the impact of the crisis on workers. If the unions take special responsibility for gathering information on the impact of the crisis on both formal and informal workers, they can become stronger in insisting on contributing to the measures that Niger must adopt in its effort to recover from the crisis.

SOUTH SUDAN: In search of stability and ready to fight **COVID-19**



South Sudan, the youngest republic in Africa, has a population of about 11 million people and immense natural resources. It is recovering from a long civil war of almost seven years after the separation from Sudan. It has been plagued by destabilization, rebellions and militias and is

marked by poor infrastructure and clearly inadequate health systems. The recent agreement between the Government in Juba and opposition forces led by Riek Machar promises more stability into the future.

South Sudan, where United Nations presence is significant,

with its personnel and peacekeeping forces going in and out and with many members of the business community having regular interaction with the outside world, seems paradoxically to have been spared for sometime in comparison with neighbouring countries.

Nevertheless, the country did not wait for the confirmation of the first case to put in place restrictive measures. The President of the Republic Salva Kiir Mayardit set up a High-Level Taskforce on COVID-19, chaired by the First Vice President, Riek Machar, to coordinate the national response on COVID-19. It became the 51st African country to report a case of coronavirus infection and declared its first case on 5 April 2020, when its measures had already been in place since 14 March.

restrictions

South Sudan began on 14th March, 2020, by suspending all flights from coronavirus affected countries. Between March 20 and 25, it put in place further measures, tightening them as the number of cases increased. These measures included:

- closure of all schools and universities;
- prohibition of all sporting, social, political and religious gatherings;
- decree of a curfew from 8:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. for 6 weeks. The starting time was later changed to start at 7pm;
- closure of restaurants, except for take-away food;
- prohibition of «Bodaboda» motorcycle taxis from carrying passengers;
- suspension of domestic

Preventive measures and

flights between the capital Juba and the states; between the states, and later of all public and private ground transportation;

- travel ban on all officials;
- quarantine of all diplomats and other citizens and residents allowed to return to the country;
- closure of borders, except for the transport of goods and foodstuffs;
- intensive campaign on personal hygiene, reducing human contact, maintaining social distancing in the workplace.

As in some other countries, the implementation of these measures has not been easy. Despite the punitive measures put in place, there have been clear cases of non-compliance and mistrust on the part of

the population. A significant incident was reported in the media on 27th March 2020 where hundreds of people in northern Upper Nile escaped from a quarantine centre in Renk district. About 500 South Sudanese crossed the border into neighbouring Sudan.

However, the negative impact in terms of access to basic necessities as a result of the measures have been minimal. This may be because the country still benefits from the support of UN and humanitarian organizations.

In addition, the Government put in place a system to monitor and support constituencies in the management of the response.

The Ministry of General Education in South Sudan also launched a commendable initiative, involving a distance education programme of essential courses such as English, mathematics

and science for primary and secondary school students. These courses were to be broadcast on national radio and television stations.

Trade Union intervention

Among the measures proposed in favour of workers is one relating to a four-hour working day with full pay. This measure was adopted by the Ministry of Labour, which is part of the Taskforce chaired by the Vice President of the Republic.

The South Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation (SSWTUF) has reported that the union collaborates with the Ministries of Labour and Health and is involved in making and monitoring decisions that have been taken to combat the spread of COVID-19.

In partnership with health institutions and local NGOs, the union sensitizes workers for one hour a day through the official

radio station. The SSWTUF is satisfied that the government is doing its best within the limits of available resources and the support of development partners.

Prior to the health crisis, however, the salaries of public servants had been frozen for six months

Since 7 May, South Sudan began to relax the restrictions, despite the rising number of cases in the country. As of May 25, 655 cases had been confirmed with 6 recoveries and 8 deaths.

Of particular note is the narrowing of the curfew; the resumption of the activities of bars and restaurants; permission to carry passengers on motorcycles; and the opening of shops, in compliance with the measures of social distancing, curfew and compulsory wearing of masks.

Relaxing the restrictions may

be a way of appeasing the population, which was not calling, not only for a normal resumption of activities, but also for the continuation of national reconstruction in the context of the lull between the militias.

In South Sudan, the economy is mainly based on oil which has posed many challenges in recent times. The opportunities for collaboration and national mobilization which the crisis has provided should be built upon.

The chance that the SSWTUF has had in joining to make decisions on the national response to COVID-19 and in monitoring their implementation should be used by the social partners to strengthen social dialogue so that the workers' voice can feature in national decision making. This can also help South Sudan to consolidate its stability coming out of a protracted civil war and lay the basis for its peaceful progress.

Management of the **COVID-19** Crisis in Cameroon



As of May 27, 2020, Cameroon had 5,436 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 1,996 recoveries and 175 deaths. The coronavirus pandemic is having a negative impact on the Cameroonian economy which has recorded losses of about 800 billion FCFA (approx. USD 1.3 billion).

Several economic sectors, notably tourism, transport and services have been particularly affected. According to a study by the Employers Association of Cameroon (GICAM), these sectors have seen a decline in activity of about 92%.

Cameroon, which opted for

partial lockdown, has recently lifted some restrictions in order to stimulate economic activity.

Restrictive measures

Following the report of the index case of COVID-19 in Yaoundé, Cameroon on March 6, 2020, the President of the Republic, Paul Biya, prescribed on March 17, thirteen (13) measures to limit and control the spread of the virus in the country.

These measures included the closure of borders, the postponement of sports competitions, the closure of schools and universities, the closure of bars and the suspension of entry visas to Cameroon.

In addition, restaurants and leisure facilities were closed from 6 p.m. onwards. Gatherings of more than fifty (50) people and overloading in buses, taxis and taxi-motos were prohibited. The measures also covered

the restriction of urban and interurban travel and the regulation of customer traffic in markets and shopping centres.

In addition to these measures, the Cameroonian government recommended that the population respect the rules of hygiene and social distancing measures announced by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Social and economic measures

To deal with the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the President of the Republic called on his government to show ingenuity and creativity.

On 31st March, President Biya established a special solidarity fund to fight the pandemic. According to the Cameroonian presidency, the fund, initially endowed with the sum of US\$ 1,681,833 (CFAF 1 billion), was intended to finance operations

under the strategy for preventing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in Cameroon.

On 30th April, measures aimed at cushioning the shock suffered by households and businesses as a result of the restrictions related to the fight against COVID-19 were announced by the Cameroonian Prime Minister. They covered the suspension, for a period of three months, of the payment of parking charges (i.e. penalty for occupying port space beyond the duty-free days) and demurrage (penalty for holding the container at a terminal beyond the duty-free period) in the ports of Douala and Kribi, as regards essential goods. This was a measure that would have an impact on customs revenue. In addition, at the tax level, the government prescribed full deductibility for the determination of corporate income tax of donations and concessions granted by companies for the fight against

the COVID-19 pandemic; exemption from the axle load tax for the 2nd quarter; exemption from the tourist tax in the hotel and restaurant sector for the rest of the year 2020, starting from March 2020.

The Government also decided to cancel penalties for late payment of social security contributions due to the National Social Welfare Fund, the payment between May and July of allowances to workers whose employers find it difficult to pay their social security contributions, an increase in family allowances from CFAF 2,800 to CFAF 4,500 and a 20% increase in pensions.

The management of this fund was strongly criticised by the social partners, who considered the measures taken insufficient to alleviate employers' tax burdens. Further, none of the accompanying measures addressed the loss of earnings

of workers who went on unpaid technical leave.

Crisis management under the backdrop of political division

While Cameroon was struggling to control the pandemic, opposition initiatives suffered from various fortunes. For having undertaken to distribute masks and hydro-alcoholic gels to the population, six members of the solidarity operation «Survie-Cameroun», launched by the opposition leader, Maurice Kamto, were arrested. After five days in prison, the six detainees accused of «gang rebellion» were finally released following multiple pressures.

The arrest and detention of these people caused a wave of uproar in the country and beyond. For Ilaria Allegrozzi, senior Human Rights Watch (HRW) researcher for Central Africa, the arrest highlighted the government's desire to suppress any efforts by the opposition, fuelling political

divisions at a time when national cooperation is more necessary than ever.

Role of trade unions

The Cameroonian trade union landscape is very complex and dominated by pluralism, which has been abused by trade union leaders and therefore put workers at a disadvantage. While continuing to raise awareness at the local level, unions must reflect on how to secure safety at the workplace, protect jobs and advocate for social protection for all in the society.

A permanent platform for inter-union collaboration and cohesion is essential for unions in Cameroon if they are to be able to address the difficult challenges that face Cameroonian workers.

Such a platform can strengthen their effort to secure social dialogue with the government and employers so that together they can formulate responses to the crisis and also work for post crisis policies that benefit the people of Cameroon.

Tanzania's Approach to Fighting **COVID-19** – Saving the economy for the people or acting to their detriment?



Tanzania has been under scrutiny from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other institutions for various reasons since COVID-19 began to spread across Africa. Specifically, Tanzania's approach to fighting the spread of the virus has been classified as not being stringent enough

and dominated by secrecy. The Tanzanian President, John Magufuli, has been criticized for repeatedly playing down the gravity of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Government has objected to adopting strict lockdown protocols or restricting the

movement of its citizens to contain the spread of the virus as done by other countries. This has appeared as a radical and unconventional approach to many, including the Tanzanian people, other countries, the World Health Organization and the Africa Union.

The Tanzanian Government has condemned the need for a lockdown of the country for two main reasons:

- Economic implications of a lockdown on the economy
- Alleged over-rating of the severity of the pandemic.

In a number of news updates, the President has continuously raised concerns and made allegations about testing kits which he emphasizes are faulty and constitute an attempt of 'imperialist foreign powers' to misrepresent the country's rate of infection.

Responding to these claims by the President of Tanzania, the head of the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), Dr. John Nkengasong affirmed that the test kits that Tanzania and other African countries are using have «been validated and are performing very well». He further emphasized that co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration were vital if the fight against COVID-19 was to be successful.

As of May 11, 2020, according to statistics from worldometer, the cumulative number of infected cases in Tanzania stood at 509 with 21 deaths and 183 recoveries. The country's first reported case on March 16, 2020 was an imported one by a 46-year old Tanzanian woman who had arrived from Belgium.

Comparatively, Kenya had recorded 700 cases with 33 deaths and 251 recoveries whilst

Uganda had recorded 121 cases with 0 death and 55 recoveries. Both countries share borders with Tanzania and have adopted various lockdown and restrictive measures to contain the spread of the virus since March when the number of cases began to increase in the East Africa sub region.

According to the African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Tanzania had conducted just 652 tests, as of 7 May, 2020. This compared to over 26,000 tests conducted in Kenya and nearly 45,000 in Uganda.

So what measures have been adopted by the Government to reduce the spread of the virus?

Following the report of the first COVID case on March 16th, the Prime Minister of Tanzania announced a range of measures to contain the spread.

These included:

- Closure of all schools including universities
- Suspension of political gatherings and rallies
- Suspension of sports activities such as the Vodacom Premier League and interschool games throughout the country
- 14 day quarantine of all incoming travelers from COVID affected countries at travelers' own cost.

These measures, according to the Prime Minister, were subject to be reviewed by Government based on the evolution of the situation.

Meanwhile, the President has urged people to continue working and attend religious ceremonies. According to him, it is vital that people still go to places of worship to find «true healing». Concerns have been raised over this as these are areas where social distancing is

difficult to observe.

Limitations and Concerns over the Government's Approach to Fighting the Pandemic

In Tanzania, the government's main priority appears to be to keep the economy going as President Magufuli refuses to close markets or the lucrative port in the commercial hub of Dar es Salaam. Strict social distancing protocols have not been enforced in the country of 56 million people.

There have been reports and fears about the Government hiding true numbers of cases with videos circulating of secret night burials, overflowing hospitals of people with COVID-19 symptoms and the death of three MPs in less than a fortnight. Though there is no real evidence, doctors, opposition leaders and activists have suspiciously linked these deaths to coronavirus.

Meanwhile, the President of Tanzania has ordered the suspension of allowances to politicians who refuse to attend parliamentary sessions due to alleged concerns over COVID-19 following the death of the three MPs. This is said to be mainly targeted at opposition politicians.

There are also claims by the opposition that "the disease has gotten out of control". The Chairman of CHADEMA (opposition party) argues that till date, the Government has not presented a supplementary budget to Parliament that would allocate resources for combatting the spread of the virus.

Furthermore, several reports point to a clamp down on civil rights in Tanzania. Amnesty International has called on the Tanzanian Government to end its crackdown on journalists, citing examples of reporters and

media outlets that have had their licenses suspended for reporting on COVID-19.

Trade Union Roles

Trade unions have been loud in their absence in the Tanzanian situation. There are no records of engagement of trade unions or civil society organizations in providing input into Governments response to COVID as seen in most countries across Africa and the world at large.

Furthermore, there are no

records of special social protection measures to support vulnerable groups or persons affected by the virus during this period as is the case in many countries.

Attempts by sub-regional and regional trade union organizations to reach out to Tanzanian trade unions that are affiliated to them have not yielded any results to date.

By and large, there is growing concern at the Tanzanian Government's approach towards combatting the raging pandemic. The case of Tanzania seems to demonstrate a conflict between prioritizing the economy and meeting the needs of public safety and health. So

far the Government's response appears to be informed more by the President's personal worldview than by scientific evidence and recommendations of key institutions such as the World Health Organization.

Meanwhile, according to

economic projections by the IMF, the economic growth of the country is set to slow down from 6.3% in 2019 to 2% in 2020 due to the pandemic. Thus, while the adopted approach of the Tanzanian Government to the COVID-19 does not necessarily seem favorable for the country's economy, the social costs of this approach may also be dire. The lack of accurate and up to date data, limited testing, absence of strict protocols to contain the spread of the virus, absence of incentives and support for working people and vulnerable persons, and the non-involvement of key stakeholders in dialogue and consultation on the formulation of responses to

fight the pandemic, all present a cause for worry.

For now, advocates and supporters of Madagascar's "self-proclaimed plant-based cure" for COVID-19 welcome recent news update that Tanzania has joined a number of African countries in ordering 'COVID-Organics'. The herbal medicine is claimed to cure COVID-19, however the efficacy of this medicine is yet to be certified and approved by the World Health Organization. The African Center for Disease Control and Prevention has also said the drink must undergo 'rigorous testing' and approval.

Management of the **COVID-19** Crisis in Chad



Following the announcement of the first case of COVID-19 on 19th March, 2020 in Chad, the country had as of March 28 recorded 715 cases with 359 recoveries and 64 deaths. The competent authorities have taken a series of measures to limit the spread of the virus. At

a time when some countries are gradually lifting the lockdown, Chad has decided to isolate its capital and a number of towns.

Restrictive measures

Faced with the magnitude of the situation, the Chadian authorities announced on 24th March, 2020, the establishment

of a Health Surveillance and Security Committee as well as a 15 billion CFAF (approx. USD 25 million) contingency plan for the fight against the coronavirus.

Among the measures taken by the Committee were the establishment of a coordination platform and a care facility for suspected or confirmed cases, quarantine measures for persons from countries at risk, the suspension of flights to N'Djamena beginning from 18th March, and the establishment of an emergency response team. In addition, further measures were taken to introduce restrictions on gatherings, on the number of passengers on public transport, on the opening of non-essential shops and to impose a curfew from 8pm to 5am.

It was forbidden to organize a funeral or to go in or out of the city of N'Djamena, with an exemption for vehicles transporting goods

and foodstuffs.

Since 7th May, 2020, places of worship remain closed and everybody must wear a mask or face a fine.

A state of health emergency was declared on 25th April for a period of 21 days. It was extended on 15th May by the National Assembly for a period of two months, from 16th May to 16th July, 2020. Again, on 15th May, a Presidential Decree established a new Health Crisis Management Committee (CGCS) to replace the Health Surveillance and Security Committee. The new CGCS was placed under the authority and direct supervision of the President of the Republic, Idris Deby, and was composed essentially of members of the government and the civil cabinet director of the President of the Republic. Its mission is to define and implement the national management strategy of the COVID-19 pandemic and to direct, coordinate, monitor and

evaluate all the interventions of the actors involved in the management of the health crisis. Generally speaking, the Committee will have oversight over all measures for addressing the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences throughout the national territory.

Health Measures

- Setting up of a National Coordination of Health Response led by scientists and dedicated to the operational fight against COVID-19 (CNRS-COVID-19)
- Inclusion of deep Chad in the health response strategy with the establishment of the Provincial Health Response Coordination (CPRS), led by eminent specialists in each province.
- Creation of five (5) specialized inclusive sub-committees dedicated respectively to sensitization, assistance to

the poor, defence and security.

- Urgent launch of additional orders for essential medical equipment, including Covid-Organics, which should be available throughout the country.
- Acquisition of at least five (5) Mobile Laboratories in order to increase screening capacity and the increase in the capacity of the Renaissance and Farcha hospitals.
- Making available of all public structures in the provinces (hotels, schools) for the care of patients, if necessary.

The CGCS has announced special measures for health workers. These include the granting of special compensation for health care workers infected with the coronavirus in the performance of their duties. It should also be noted that the salaries of health care workers who die from

COVID-19 will be maintained for their dependents (until the children reach the age of majority).

Social and economic measures

Faced with the heavy economic losses caused by this crisis, the Government Spokesperson announced on Wednesday 20th May, 2020, the introduction of new measures to reconcile the fight against COVID-19 with economic and social needs. These measures included:

- The reopening of restaurants (including grilling areas) for take-away food.
- The reopening of shops, stores and markets, in compliance with health regulations.
- The authorization of urban transport with a number of passengers limited to four for taxis and ten for minibuses.

Failure to comply with the

conditions attached to such relief measures exposed offenders to the sanctions provided for that purpose, and could lead to the reinstatement of total prohibition measures.

A National Solidarity and Support Fund for vulnerable sections of the population with a budget of 100 billion FCAF (approx. USD 169 million) has been established in addition to the special fund. This is to expand and strengthen social safety nets throughout the country to cover other provinces not covered by current projects and programmes.

Other measures include:

- Paying of electricity and water bills related to domestic use at the level of the lowest social brackets for a period of 3 months and 6 months.
- Reduction of 50% on general tax on income and patent for the benefit of taxpayers

throughout the national territory, for the year 2020.

- Completion of Youth Entrepreneurship Fund in agreement with Chadian banks for an amount of 30 billion
- Measures to support economic actors that entail significant costs amounting to CFAF 943 billion, of which more than CFAF 200 billion is to be immediately mobilized as part of the restructuring of the State budget.
- Launching of the operation aimed at distributing food to the most destitute to start on Wednesday 20 May, pending the delivery of food ordered from abroad.
- Implementation of a reinforced action plan to make a success of the 2020 crop season.
- Distribution of free masks

- Continued repatriation of Chadians stranded abroad.

Involvement of trade unions

Several health workers were infected due to lack of protective equipment.

The Health Workers' Union complained about the deaths of health workers and has been pressurising the Minister of Health to get the government to pay special attention to health workers on the front lines of the response. The union has been essentially calling on the government to train and protect workers engaged in the fight against coronavirus so that they are safe to provide quality care to patients.

The Chadian trade unions also regret the fact that the measures taken by the authorities have not taken informal workers into due consideration. Women workers are mobilizing for an outreach campaign.

In its assessment, the Health Crisis Management Committee has expressed concern that the restrictive measures and social distancing protocols are not adequately respected by some citizens and that this contributes to the accelerated spread of the virus.

The weakness of trust between the authorities and the population partly accounts for the lack of respect for some of the measures put in place to fight the pandemic. This can be helped if the authorities make special effort to reach out to the population, including trade unions, who do not

readily benefit from means of social dialogue. More space for trade union involvement in the response to COVID-19 will help in the popular messaging that is needed for citizens to also take up individual responsibility in the fight against the coronavirus.

On their part, the unions must see it as a duty to their members and their families to continue raising the issues of personnel protective equipment. In addition, unions must work hard to highlight the impacts of the crisis on workers and to demand and seek measures that help workers to meet the challenges posed by the current crisis.

COVID-19 - RESPONSE FROM LIBERIA



Liberia suffered two major civil wars between 1989 and 2003 that killed well over 400,000 thousand people. Still fragile from the war, the country was hit eleven years later by the Ebola virus epidemic in 2014 which lasted till 2015. A poor country struggling to recover from the devastation

of years before and engulfed in massive social and economic difficulties was the Liberia that COVID-19 entered to wreak further havoc.

The first case of COVID-19 in Liberia was confirmed on 16th March. The infected person was a government official returning

from Switzerland. He admitted to having violated the screening protocols, which had been instituted earlier, when he arrived at the country's international airport. The second case was confirmed on 17 March and the infected person was a close contact of the first case. The third case, also involving a returning traveler, was confirmed on 20 March. Following this, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs declared a national health emergency on 22 March, 2020.

Government measures to address the pandemic

- The Liberian President George Weah declared a nationwide state of emergency on 8 April, 2020, with mandatory lockdown in several regions, including the capital, Monrovia, to combat the spread of the coronavirus. The Liberian Senate has since approved an extension of the state of emergency throughout the country for 90 days in order to control the spread of the coronavirus.
- Among the immediate measures adopted, the President banned the entry into Liberia of persons from countries where there were more than 200 confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- The Government, in coordination with the United Nations (UN), Donor Partners, the Ministry of Health and the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL) put in place the National Multi-sectoral Response Plan (NMRP) to COVID-19.
- The President also appointed Ms Mary Broh to act as National Coordinator of the Executive Committee on coronavirus (ECOC) response in Liberia. In this role, Ms. Broh

is to oversee a unique set of national strategic objectives to defeat the coronavirus disease.

- The President again appointed Finda Bundoo as National Compliance Officer, responsible for overseeing the overall allocation and disbursement of logistics and resources for the COVID-19 response. In consultation with the National Response Coordinator, Ms. Bundoo is to ensure the timely delivery of supplies for the control of COVID-19 in the country and account for them .
- 200 contact tracers have been recruited, trained and deployed on an emergency basis with the assistance of the United Nations. They are responsible for identifying those who have been in contact with infected persons and, in case they have symptoms, testing them. The contact tracers are

also responsible for educating the community about how to prevent infections.

Other measures

- The country received debt service relief from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on 13 April to free funds for the country in its fight against the pandemic.
- The Public Service has been asked to grant leave with pay to non-essential employees;
- Religious institutions and schools were urged to make regular handwashing arrangements for the safety of all;
- Motorcycle taxi drivers were asked to take only 01 passenger at a time, and the taxi to take 02 passengers in the back to provide space for

passengers to observe as much social distancing as possible.

The Government has announced free electricity and water supply, but it is not clear that citizens have benefited yet.

Roles and Contribution of Trade Unions in the Fight Against the Pandemic

Le Congrès du travail du Libéria (LLC) s'est efforcé d'exiger certaines des mesures qui ont jusqu'à présent été mises en œuvre dans la lutte contre la pandémie. C'est la demande de la LLC qu'a été créer un groupe de travail COVID-19 dans le pays, qui a conduit à la nomination d'une doyenne, Mary Broh, en tant que coordinatrice nationale du comité susmentionné. C'est également le plaidoyer de la LLC qui a conduit à la création d'un comité de distribution de l'aide alimentaire présidé par l'honorable Wilson Tarpeh, ministre du commerce, assisté

du ministre de l'agriculture avec le soutien du Secrétariat du Programme alimentaire mondial.

La LLC a participé activement aux délibérations du Conseil national tripartite qui a décidé qu'il n'y aurait pas de licenciements de travailleurs pendant cette période.

Le Conseil a décidé que les travailleurs non essentiels des secteurs public ou privé pourraient être renvoyés chez eux pendant les 90 premiers jours avec 50% de leur salaire, tandis que ceux qui se

qualifiés comme travailleurs essentiels resteraient à leur emploi avec 100% de leur salaire.

La LLC a également plaidé pour que ceux de l'économie informelle dont le travail avait été gravement entravé par la mesure du couvre-feu, reçoivent un soutien pour les empêcher de tomber dans le dénuement.

L'organisation LLC, a également été impliquée dans des opérations de sensibilisation au respect des différentes mesures préventives annoncées par le ministère de la Santé, dans la distribution de l'aide alimentaire et d'autres actions de mise en œuvre du plan de réponse COVID 19.

As of May 22, 2020, the number of confirmed cases in Liberia stands at 249 cases with 136 recoveries and 24 deaths. This shows a steady rise in the spread of the disease. As in other African countries it is clear that the virus is still spreading and has not reached its peak of infection. While Africa and the rest of the world struggle to find a cure for the new coronavirus unions must continue to do

their bit to contain the virus and prevent its spread and also to ensure that people are able to earn their livelihoods.

For unions, this requires serious focus on what is important for workers. In the first place, the issue of safety and health at work becomes of critical importance. This is to make sure that the world of work continues to be where workers earn a living

and not where we contract the deadly virus. As the pressures of economy and survival lead to the easing of restrictions and the resumption of work, the union must be a champion in ensuring that protective clothing and equipment are available and that work is organised in ways that allow the necessary physical distancing required to prevent easy transmission of the virus. Again, in Liberia as in many parts of Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weakness of our economic and social fabric, particularly the weakness and near absence of

social protection for the majority of our people. Our unions need to become more determined in advocating and campaigning for social protection, for quality public services and for employment. This we can do only if we pay the necessary attention to uniting workers and representing them faithfully. That way we can push our governments to do what they are elected for, namely, enacting policies and laws that serve the needs of development and bring material benefits to the people.

ERITREA: Citizen participation in response to **COVID-19** and time for renewal



Eritrea had experienced low economic growth rates in recent years that had impacted on its status as a least developed and economically fragile country. Experts had recently, however, predicted a positive economic outlook in the coming years with upward growth forecasts for 2020

and 2021. This was probably due to the recent lifting of UN sanctions, the achievement of the Peace and Friendship Agreement with Ethiopia, the cessation of hostilities with Djibouti and the promise of financial reforms, all of which had also led to a return of international organisations and potential investors.

This was the context in which the coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19, hit Eritrea. On 21st March 2020, Eritrea confirmed the first COVID-19 case in Asmara of an Eritrean national arriving from Norway. The first response from government was to urge people not to travel to or from high-risk countries. All incoming travelers who had recently visited China, Italy, South Korea or Iran were quarantined.

Preventive measures

From 26th March, 2020, Eritrea decreed the first precautionary measures, which were then reinforced by a total lockdown which has been drastically implemented since 2 April 2020. These measures were to remain in force for 21 days.

The measures included the following:

- All citizens were obliged

to stay at home, except those engaged in essential development and security tasks; a limited number of people per household were allowed to go out to buy basic food items or for emergency medical care.

- All commercial activities and transactions were prohibited during this period.
- Weekly markets across the country were closed;
- Food production, supply and processing companies, as well as grocery stores, pharmacies and banks would continue to provide services but close at 8 p.m.
- All government institutions were to move away from routine services and functions and focus on the indispensable tasks of development and

security.

- With the exception of a few designated employees, the majority of public sector employees would remain confined at home and would not be allowed to use their private cars during this period.
- All public and private institutions pursuing their activities were to strictly respect social distancing.
- The main sectors of agri-food production and processing services, construction, transportation of goods would continue to operate.
- Citizens in rural areas engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry continued to carry out their usual tasks, which were considered essential for development.
- All employees should not be laid off and would receive their full salary for the period
- Payments of electricity, water and telephone bills were deferred.
- All court hearings at all levels were postponed until further notice.
- All public gatherings, sporting and cultural events, social events (funerals, weddings, baptisms and other gatherings) that bring together a crowd of more than 10 people were prohibited. Cinemas and nightclubs would remain closed until further notice. Social distancing must be respected in other units and shopping centres.
- All Eritrean nationals living abroad were urged to take all necessary precautionary

measures for their own safety and that of their families and to refrain from travelling to Eritrea.

- The staff members of public and private organisations who would continue their activities were to be issued permits by their respective institutions.

As elsewhere, the Government systematically deployed security officers to secure compliance. But for greater effectiveness it also involved public officials, religious leaders and neighbourhood committees to monitor compliance. This seems to have paid off. As of May 21, 2020 there have been 39 confirmed cases with all 39 having recovered.

Other measures and their impact

The Government sent out a strong message of awareness

evoking a sense of the «strong and resilient character of the Eritrean people» and in the face of this threat called for the compassion and solidarity of all. A formidable system was then put in place involving contributions from a wide range of persons and entities. This included fund-raising from the wealthiest citizens, the business community, enterprises and other parastatals. It also involved contributions from citizens, associations, cooperatives, churches, part of employees' salaries and most importantly from Eritreans resident abroad and the Eritrean diaspora, grouped by country or individually. Contributions from the diaspora were particularly important, given that customarily remittances from the diaspora are considerable and add up significantly to national income.

Donations were to be made in cash and in kind. An information site

in English and local languages has been set up to publish the donations collected as a form of acknowledgment and publicity and hopefully as incentive for others to contribute.

One of the powerful images demonstrating civic commitment and discipline was that of young volunteers who organised the spraying and disinfection of some markets in Asmara as well as some overcrowded areas of the city. This was done in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

Tourism and the transport industry are reported to have been severely hit by the measures of restriction imposed to contain and prevent the spread of the virus. Furthermore, informal economy workers who depend on daily activities to earn a living have also been severely hit by the measures.

Union interventions

As the threat of COVID-19 became imminent in Eritrea, the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) became concerned and directed its energy to the prevention and spread of the disease in workplaces and to ensuring the safety of workers. The emergency response action of the union included workplace visits and organising awareness raising seminars.

NCEW Executives and leaders of its five federations visited several major enterprises where they discussed with workers the dangers of the disease and the prevention mechanisms to be put in place and respected by workers. The need to provide materials for hygiene like sanitizers, keeping safe physical distances for working, daily taking of temperatures, retaining only key personnel at work and

enforcing paid leave were some of the issues discussed.

The NCEW also purchased and distributed 41 barrels of disinfectant alcohol to 90 enterprises in all 6 regions of the country to be used as sanitizer. It also collaborated with the Eritrean Textile factory for the production and distribution to several enterprises of over 20,000 face masks.

International Workers' Day was symbolically celebrated with the donation of blood to the National Blood Transfusion Centre by 40 young trade unionists from the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW). The NCEW, at the same time, made a statement through its Secretary General Tekeste Baire, appealing to the workers to scrupulously respect the directives issued by the Government and the promise of material and financial support to the people's effort.

Since the war of independence, Eritrea has experienced many difficulties. Admittedly, the long period of political uncertainty and "no war no peace with Ethiopia" put Eritrea in great difficulty.

But the country undoubtedly has a resilient capacity and economic potential in terms of tourism, agriculture, livestock, many natural resources (e.g. copper, gold and silver), and access to the sea through two major ports.

The pandemic is gradually being brought under control, and it appears that the current governance system has provided an effective system for containing the coronavirus and preventing it from spreading quickly.

While we do not to have much

information on the impact on the economy, employment and livelihoods, with the low ranking of the country in the Human Development Index of the UNDP (182nd out of 189 countries) we are bound to agree with the NCEW's observation on the worsening of living conditions of the citizens.

The COVID-19 crisis appears to have created in Eritrea an unprecedented wave of solidarity since Independence. This sense of solidarity can be built upon to arouse popular mobilization for recovery and development.

But to do so effectively may also require the nurturing of a political atmosphere that allows for freer popular expression and democratic participation. It would help if the NCEW uses its character as a mass organisation to provide the space for popular expression. This can contribute to the growth of social dialogue as an important means through which workers get heard and make their input into important decisions that affect economic and social development of the country and impact on their lives and that of their families.

Handling of **COVID-19** Crisis in Congo-Brazzaville



Congo-Brazzaville has not been spared by the COVID-19 pandemic which, since March, 2020, has turned into a global health crisis with unprecedented economic and social consequences. Following the occurrence of the first case of COVID-19 in the country on 14th March, 2020,

the Government put in place preventive measures to limit the spread of the virus. Later, in order to support these measures, the Government declared a state of health emergency, which has been extended twice. Also instituted were a curfew from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m, a set of operating rules governing sales in state

operated markets, a set of socio-economic measures in favour of the population, and measures designed to have people confined to their homes, except those working in the provision of essential goods and services.

As of 27th May, 2020, Congo Brazzaville had 572 confirmed cases with 161 recoveries and 19 deaths.

Social and economic measures

Among the economic and social measures taken, the following should be noted:

- the establishment of two funds, in particular the COVID-19 fund to facilitate the health response and the national solidarity fund to support businesses and households;
- access to free supply of water and electricity throughout the period of confinement;

- assistance to vulnerable people through traditional arrangements, such as LISUNGI, and through special arrangements that could help to identify and assist households whose livelihood conditions have worsened since the emergence of COVID-19.

Process of easing the lockdown

After 46 days of total lockdown, the National Coordination for the Management of the COVID-19 pandemic, under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic, began the process of gradually lifting the lockdown. This was needed to strike a balance between public health interests and national socio-economic sustainability. The process has been under way since Monday, 18th May, 2020.

The decision on lifting the lockdown is coupled with the diligent implementation of measures to ensure its success. To that end, the Government

identified two zones. The first zone is known as the zone of active spread of the virus, which includes the cities of Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire; and the second zone is known as the zone of non-active spread of the virus, which includes the other ten counties of the country.

The requirements for the lifting of lockdown include the following:

- Increase and effectively raise public awareness on strict observance of all barrier and social distancing measures.
- Make good quality masks available to the population in sufficient quantities.
- Strengthen the capacity for clinical care.
- Strengthen biological control (with the aim to increase screening capacity from 400 to 1,800 tests per day between

May and September 2020 and to more than 4,000 tests per day by October 2020).

With regards to measures for easing the lockdown in the first zone, particularly in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, which are localities with a high prevalence of the virus, the following are noted:

1. Work will resume according to the schedules arranged by employers for non-essential activities;
2. travel authorisations and permits as well as passes for personal vehicles have been abolished;
3. The free movement of personal vehicles is allowed, provided that no more than four people, including the driver, are carried on board;
4. the resumption of intra-urban public transport shall be authorised, provided that the driver, ticket inspector and passengers wear masks and that the number of passengers

is limited.

Concerning the easing of lockdown in the second zone, which covers counties that are free of infection or only slightly infected, all restrictive measures have been lifted, except for the curfew which will be in force until 31st May, 2020. The obligation remains to apply barrier and social distancing measures, and to wear masks in open or closed public places.

The following arrangements have been envisaged in the context of the lifting of lockdown by sector of activity:

- Educational institutions will open from 1st June, 2020 to facilitate the resumption of classes for pupils preparing for exams.
- The resumption of the other classes has been postponed until September, 2020.

- Restaurants and bars are only allowed to sell takeaway and home delivery meals and beverages.
- The markets will be open five days a week until 4 p.m. The opening days and conditions of operation of the markets will be determined by the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization in consultation with the Ministry of Health.

In addition, the curfew from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. throughout the territory, the closure of air, land, river and sea borders, except for cargo aircraft, vehicles and boats carrying goods, remain in force. The ban on gatherings of more than 50 people in public and private places, the closure of university residences, boarding schools and places of worship also remain in force.

Similarly, companies and businesses authorized to

resume their activities will first have to formulate measures to be applied to guarantee the protection of their workers and customers in terms of both health and safety.

Involvement of trade unions

With a view to supporting the Government's efforts to manage the crisis, the trade unions are carrying out public information and awareness-raising activities on the measures that the Government has put in place and other protective measures

that should be taken.

Trade unions are also conducting advocacy work with employers and asking them to provide workers, and more specifically health personnel, with the necessary protective equipment. In this context of crisis, trade unions must step up their effort to help establish a genuine national dialogue that results in social and economic measures that guarantee the well being of workers and the population at large.

THE COMOROS facing the **Covid-19** crisis



Located at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel between Madagascar and the eastern coast of Africa, the Union of the Comoros is an archipelago made up of four islands with a total area of 2,612 km² (according to Wikipedia). The Union of the Comoros is one of the Small

Island Developing States (SIDS) and also of the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs). It has recently been classified as a middle-income country but remains a fragile state in the reconstruction and reform phase.

Given the importance that

the tourism sector has for this Archipelago and the risk of importation of the virus due to numerous exchanges between countries, the Union of the Comoros took steps to develop a response to the COVID 19 pandemic even before the coronavirus arrived in the country.

Decisions and implementation of the strategy to fight the Coronavirus

On April 3, 2020, the National COVID 19 Pandemic Coordination Committee was established by Presidential Decree. The Committee was structured with sub-committees on logistics, communication, security, economy support, administrative and financial as well as scientific matters.

A national plan was developed and adopted by the Presidency of the Republic to serve as a framework and working tool for the National Committee.

The plan was to reinforce the preparation capabilities, including an alert and response system to a possible outbreak with several planned scenarios. A number of initial measures were taken, including:

- The imposition of curfew from 8 pm to 5 am;
- Mosques and other places of worship were closed and Friday prayers were suspended;
- number of passengers in taxis and other public transport were reduced by half depending on the type of vehicle;
- all commercial and international flights were suspended with the exception of cargo flights;
- the University as well as other public and private educational institutions were closed.

Once the measures were implemented, a number of measures to detect early cases of infection and to slow local transmission and contain the virus were put in place. Measures were also developed for care and treatment. These included:

- strengthening awareness and training of health personnel;
- establishment of an operational response committee with an activation and coordination mechanism;
- reinforcement of surveillance in health facilities, entry points and at community level;
- activation of the two multidisciplinary operational technical coordination committees (Public Health Committee and Hospital Services Committee and laboratories), specialized and very mobile, capable of setting up an immediate response to investigate suspected cases, take samples in good and secure conditions, initiate contact monitoring if necessary, train health and support staff, supply equipment for the security of the health staff and, if necessary, initiate isolation of patients under observation or confirmed cases in compliance with good care practices;
- an epidemiological investigation triggered by the Epidemiological Surveillance Service, in order to identify the chain of transmission and take the most appropriate control measures (prevention and isolation measures);
- home isolation measures are taken for the contact persons;
- the medical treatment of each case is organised by the health structures already identified for this purpose in conjunction with the national

committee to fight the epidemic. If hospitalisation is necessary, secure transport drives the patient to the isolation and treatment site. The patient must then wear an FFP2 mask in the presence of a third party and benefit from early curative treatment.

Economic and social measures

The establishment of a Tripartite Plus Commission within the Ministry of Labour to fight COVID-19 was one of the significant decisions among many others. The main mission assigned to this Commission consisted in supporting the Government in the implementation of specific strategies and restrictive measures for a better fight against the pandemic. At the same time the Commission was to recommend the necessary support measures for dealing with the adverse effects of the restrictive measures that had been introduced.

The commission has drawn up and adopted a strategic intervention plan in which the affected companies and sectors are identified, the difficulties identified, and proposals for remedial solutions are suggested.

Trade

- Facilitate the arrival of containers of raw materials and essential products blocked in other countries such as: Mauritius - Madagascar - China - France.
- Prioritize the landing of containers of essential products and meat products.

Tourism

- See his invoices honored by the State
- Support by the State of half of the salaries of the employees

Services

- Support for these companies

by the State by subsidizing at least 30% of the salaries of employees, as stipulated in the Labor Code.

- Establish a system of social dialogue within companies
- Support the payment of rents

Industries

- See his invoices honored by the State
- The state should cover half the salaries
- The state should ensure that electricity is regularly supplied to consumers
- Eliminate fixed charges in electricity bills
- Prioritize the landing of containers:
- Raw materials to enable the operation of companies operating in the industrial

sector, such as water treatment and distribution.

Private education

- Pay a monthly allowance up to 50% of salary, 25% of which could be paid in kind, during this period of crisis

Para public transport and Hospitality

- Stop any act of dismissal
- Support up to 50% of salary for wages;
- In case of prolongation of the crisis, grant a monthly allowance of 50% of the wages to the workers, 40% of which will be paid by the State and the employer company 10%.
- After the crisis, these employees must have priority when resuming business activities

Informal

- Registration of actors at the

level of the Ministry of Labor

- Grant a flat-rate allowance, part of which could be paid in kind and the other in cash
- Strengthen hygiene and sanitation in their areas of activity

Roles of trade unions

The Comoros Confederation of workers (CTC) has been an active member of the Tripartite Plus Commission established by the Ministry of Labour.

The CTC in its Declaration dated April 20, 2020 requested the Government to:

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen the population to ensure that there are no cases of COVID-19 in the country; • ensure strict compliance with labour law to avoid abuse in such circumstances. • take concrete measures to support businesses and workers, including those in the informal sector who are already victims of the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> barrier measures against COVID-19; The informal sector, which employs more than 60% of women and young workers, requires special attention, given that many actors in this sector live on day-to-day work. do everything to stop inflation and soaring prices of basic necessities; set up a special fund |
|--|---|

to support and assist companies and workers who are victims of measures against COVID-19.

- The CTC called on unions to unite to mitigate the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers.
- The CTC demanded inclusive and constructive social dialogue to develop

responses that protect jobs and guarantee wages and livelihoods of vulnerable groups.

- The CTC supported protection and security provisions against the entry of the coronavirus into the country and supported the tripartite strategic plan submitted to the Minister in charge of labour.

Even though the country took preventive steps and was indeed one of the last countries to receive the coronavirus, the number of COVID-19 cases has risen steadily since the index case was recorded on April 30, 2020. As of May 28, confirmed cases stood at 87 with 55 recoveries and 2 deaths. The country needs to continue its

mobilization effort against the COVID-19 and to strengthen the awareness and messaging about the virus to ensure that citizens can play an active role in containing the virus. On its part, the CTTC must remain consistent as a champion for the rights and interests of the workers of Comoros in the fight against COVID-19

Egypt: The Use of Power in the fight against coronavirus



On February 14, 2020, the Egyptian Ministry of Health announced the first case of COVID-19 in the country detected at The Cairo international airport involving a Chinese national. As of May 30, 2020, Egypt had 22,082 confirmed cases with 5,511 recoveries and 879 deaths.

The great fragility of the Egyptian economy worries some experts about its ability to respond to the crisis. As the crucial sector of the Egyptian tourism recovered from the 2011 revolution, the 2013 coup and constant Islamist threats, the tourism industry estimated at 16 billion dollars has had to face the new threat of

the COVID-19. According to the Egyptian Minister for Planning, Hala el- Saeed « the rate of economic growth in Egypt will fall to 2% in the next fiscal year 2020/2021, if the coronavirus crisis continues until December 2020».

Restrictive measures

Faced with the pandemic, the authorities have taken strict measures, notably by imposing a night curfew since March 25. Violators face heavy fines and even prison terms. The authorities have also decreed the closure of schools and universities, places of worship, museums and archaeological sites. Several villages were quarantined after the detection of cases of coronavirus.

On April 22, 2020, the Egyptian Parliament approved amendments to the 1958 state of emergency law, which confers significant additional powers on President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi

and security agencies.

The Emergency Law (Law No. 162 of 1958) gives the security forces broad powers to detain and interrogate suspects indefinitely, without judicial review or being subject to limited judicial review. The law also authorizes mass surveillance, censorship, seizure of property and forced evictions, all without proper supervision by the judicial authorities.

The amendments allowed the president to order the closure of schools, the suspension of public services, the prohibition of public and private gatherings and the placing in quarantine of travellers entering the country. They also allowed the President to limit the trade in certain products, to requisition private medical centers and transform schools, educational centers and other public establishments into field hospitals.

The military prosecutor was also

allowed to assist the prosecution in investigating crimes reported by the armed forces responsible for the enforcement of the law under the state of emergency. Anyone who violates the measures imposed during the state of emergency risks being sentenced to up to 15 years in prison.

The amendments have been strongly criticised and denounced by the organizations for the defence of human rights. In a press release, the NGO, Human Rights Watch (HRW), denounced them as a «cover» for the establishment of «new repressive powers». The government insists that the amendments are to allow it to deal with the public health emergencies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the end of April, while maintaining the curfew for the month of fasting, Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly informed

the population about a gradual return to normalcy from the end of Ramadan.

In order to encourage a recovery in domestic tourism, the authorities recently announced the reopening of a quarter of the country's hotels in mid-May. And from June 1, 50 % of the hotels would be operational.

Socio-economic measures

On March 14 President Abdel Fattah Sissi announced a 100-billion-pound (approx. USD 6.3 billion) fund to deal with the health crisis. The fund was to be used to improve the health facilities and support businesses. Indeed, 20 billion has been so far allocated to support the stock market and 50 billion to help the tourism sector. The government also announced an increase in the compensation for medical professionals in the amount of 75% which is actually 400 pounds (i.e. USD 25). Incentives to increase the

number of doctors have also been undertaken.

Finally, President Abdel Fattah Sissi decided on April 1 to allocate a fund called « Long live Egypt » to cover the quarantine costs of Egyptians who returned from abroad before March 31. This was after dozens of Egyptians who returned from Kuwait expressed their refusal to pay the health quarantine costs of £ 28,000 (approx. USD 1,770) per person at the airport hotel.

Union involvement

Egyptian unions, carried out information and public awareness activities on the measures the government has put in place while emphasising

the need for protective measures for workers.

The Egyptian health workers union denounced unacceptable conditions of work characterised by the low availability of tests for hospital staff and the lack of suitable protective equipment. Unions fear an increase in contamination following the relaxation of certain measures. The trade unions need to continue in their difficult environment to bargain for better social protection system during the crisis and for the use of social dialogue to secure workplace rights and for achieving a broader and more inclusive national COVID-19 containment and recovery measures.

Domestic and gender-based violence during the period of **COVID-19**



While it is true that COVID-19 does not discriminate, its impacts affect men and women differently and exacerbate existing inequalities, including gender inequalities. Depending on their roles and responsibilities, women and especially girls are affected by

COVID-19.

When restrictions were imposed, women and men were more confined and compelled to live closer together. The risks of violence and harassment became more evident. Quarantine and isolation at home increased the risk of violence between

intimate partners and abuse by other family members, not to mention violence and sexual assault on children. The various cases of gender violence have been reported by our activists in the trade union movement and civil society and around the world. This demonstrates the urgent need to rethink the way a number of measures are currently being implemented to address the crisis. The notion of gender and social inclusion can be integrated into the options and potential response strategies to COVID-19.

Women are the main custodians of our customs and traditions as well as care-givers in our societies. They are also present in the informal economy and in low-income professions, especially in primary education, where they are in the majority. Women are front-line workers in the health services, where COVID-19 calls upon all human resources. They have therefore

been exposed to a high risk of infection with the virus.

COVID-19 has caused financial hardship and uncertainty for local and foreign domestic workers, mainly women. The reduction in working hours translated into a loss of earnings for those who earn less, among whom women are in the majority. The risk of food insecurity and malnutrition has also been high for women and children who may be the first to reduce food consumption in times of food insecurity due to intra-household inequalities and reduced financial resources within the family. The risks associated with violence, aggression and abuse can be more dreadful than the pandemic. Attention must be devoted to ensure that the measures against COVID-19 do not impact negatively on women's mental, psychological and physical health. Social protection measures, at a minimum, must be gender

sensitive and not aggravate social and gender inequalities.

Efforts to combat COVID-19 will only be truly successful and effective if they are gender-sensitive and gender-responsive. More than ever, actors in the world of work need to step up all actions and play their part in truly engaging with policy makers and other partners to ensure that:

- law enforcement officials are sensitised to the increased risk of domestic and intimate partner violence during the crisis;
- centres for the support and care of victims of violence, harassment and sexual abuse are set up and made operational; and
- social dialogue is strengthened to ensure the consistent representation of women and their inclusion in decision-making at all levels in the

response to the pandemic.

Data and resources on the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups:

- Women COVID-19: Emerging gender data and why it matters
- Gender and Development Network (GADN) List of resources: Feminist Responses to COVID-19.
- INCLUDE How COVID-19 affects inequality in Africa
- WHO (2020) Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak
- https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_739206/lang--fr/index.htm

African migrants and **COVID-19**: Facing up to the virus



Migrant workers make important contribution to the global economy and the development of countries. They continue to fill labour shortage gaps in the care (domestic and health), agriculture and food, construction, tourism/hospitality and transportation

sectors. COVID-19 has exposed them to challenges that affect them in more profound ways than other categories of workers.

Effects of COVID-19 on African migrants

Whilst the extent of the effects of COVID-19 on migrants,

refugees and displaced persons will only be fully grasped months after the successful defeat of the virus, some immediate and direct socio-economic effects have been noticed and chronicled. These include

- Migrants being stranded in transit and host countries. Some have also been trapped in sending countries and prevented from returning to work and families. Lots of these stranded and trapped migrants resorted to the use of social media to get their messages of appeals across to their different governments to evacuate them home. A large number of African labour migrants, especially domestic workers (the majority of which are women) are stranded in the Middle East and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States. There are cases of others stranded in Europe, North America (mainly the USA and Canada), Australia,

Asia and Latin America.

- Working without Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and in an unsafe environment – a number of migrants have reported (largely through social media) that they are working in homes with family members exhibiting suspected symptoms of COVID-19 and they are still been forced to work. Related to this is the fact that social distancing regulations and hygiene measures are not often enforced at their workplaces. Worse is the fact that the majority of them do not have the necessary PPEs to protect themselves. Besides, the nature of the COVID-19 crisis meant that migrant workers (especially domestic workers) are saddled with more workload.
- The psychological trauma of being separated and far from their families, as well

as the sedentary effects of the lockdown measures, are contributing to observed cases of mental discomfort amongst migrants.

- More than half of migrants' population in their host economies lost their jobs during COVID-19 lockdown measures. Although it is still too early to assess the economic costs of the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Labour Organization (ILO) expects a significant impact on the labour market across the world. The ILO forecasts a 6.7% decline in working hours in the second quarter of 2020, which is equivalent to 195 million full-time workers. Whatever the eventual outcomes with respect to the ILO forecasts, what is very likely is that we shall see a substantial loss of job opportunities, particularly in the manufacturing and services sectors. Deepening unemployment and fragility

would be experienced. The situation can worsen if they continue to be excluded from accessing social protection provisions. The net effect is that these combined challenges may feed and exacerbate irregular migration.

- Labour migration administration challenges – some authorities dealing with migrants' applications such as visa renewal, contract registration, permit renewals, etc have been stopped. This development leaves the migrants in states of uncertainty and worry. There is also the challenge of getting money as banks have also closed. Those without a new source of income and the one that cannot operate online and mobile banking are more affected.
- Loss of income and decline in remittances affect migrants and their dependents – For

labour migrants not able to earn a living because of COVID-19, their income sources are directly affected. For those without huge savings, they are also starting to go into debt. The situation is worse for their dependents. According to the Brookings Institute, Africans received \$82 billion in remittances from abroad in 2018. For Africa, the importance of remittances cannot be over-emphasised as they are sources of financing household consumptions (food, healthcare, and education fees, as well as for small business setup). The Brookings Institute also stressed that remittances amount to 5% of GDP in at least 13 African countries. In particular, it could amount to 23% of the annual income of Lesotho. Dependents of migrants are gradually beginning to see declining income (remittances) from their families abroad.

- Discrimination against African migrants in China has also been reported. African migrants in Guangzhou city are said to have been subjected to forceful evictions, refusal of service to them even where they had been regular clients, forced quarantine even when such Africans presented health clearance certificate and general maltreatment. The story is that Chinese in Guangzhou city alleged that Africans were likely to trigger a second wave of the contagion after new infections were discovered among Africans in the city. The Chinese were said to have labeled Africans as presenting a direct threat to their safety and security. As a result, the local Chinese started to display resentment and aggression against Africans to deal with this fear.

African trade unions in the protection of the rights of migrants

- Be active in countering populist narrative – Populist discourses feed fear and this should be countered by the production of a positive evidence-based narrative that highlights the proved benefits of regular and orderly migration. Trade unions must be explicit and vocal in denouncing extremist/exclusionist policies and xenophobic attacks against migrants and refugees. They can use awareness and education to improve the consciousness of their members so as to get their members to stand against extremist and populist agenda.
- Be loud and steadfast in the advocacy for humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees – the trade unions can consider developing advocacy campaigns on some of the issues identified here. Migrants stuck at the external borders of countries should be provided with adequate resources to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Critically, the general living conditions of migrants and refugees in centres, camps and workplaces should be improved and migrants should have better access to sanitation and hygiene products. Particular attention should be paid to early detection of infected people and their treatment. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) affirmed that three quarters of refugees and

migrants around the world are hosted in developing countries where health infrastructure can be very limited. Hence, specific funds should aim at providing detection kits and health equipment to the relevant structures in host countries. Humanitarian workers should also be allowed to continue their missions with migrants and refugees in optimal conditions by providing them with the necessary resources. Also, the IOM has pointed out that many irregular migrants and asylum seekers might hesitate to seek help if they have COVID-19 symptoms because they fear interception or detention by the authorities in host countries

- Direct solidarity action

towards migrants and refugees – trade unions can organise direct solidarity action such as providing food and shelter for stranded persons. They can also assist them with repatriation requests for those voluntarily seeking to return home. Commendably, we are seeing trade unions and civil society organisations from Tunisia, Niger, Kenya, Botswana, Burkina Faso, South Africa, Mali, Senegal, Uganda, Morocco, Mozambique and Togo are acting in this direction.

- Deliberately and strategically seek alliances – COVID-19 is a disease that we “learn as we go”. In other words, our knowledge of the disease improves by the day. To gain mileage and depth over

the disease and to be able to better protect ourselves, members and vulnerable groups (migrants, refugees, disabled persons, displaced place and stateless people), we strongly encourage trade unions to seek and establish strategic alliances with civil society organisations, international development institutions such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), as well as the academia and traditional and faith-based structures. Trade unions can benefit from the arrays of technical know-how, resources and community reach that these organisations possess. We commend the initiative

of the organised labour in Nigeria that established a COVID-19 Situation Room arrangement in collaboration with the members of the CSOs community.

- Make plans for recovery measures – no doubt, COVID-19 will cause, deepen and exacerbate fragilities in households, communities and economies with varying degrees. Developing and poor economies (the majority in Africa) with low and inadequate social protection measures will suffer more. We encourage African trade unions to begin to think about how they can contribute to the recovery processes. What plans can they suggest? How will such alternative trade union plans benefit and protect vulnerable groups such

as those in the informal economy, the growing army of the working poor, women (especially those who are households' heads), migrants, refugees, displaced persons? What strategies are available to trade unions to ensure adoption and implementation of such plans? Taking advantage

of the alliance relationship can help answer most of these questions. Further, we encourage trade unions to consider the ILO Recommendation 205 on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience. The ILO ACTRAV guide to R205 can also serve as a useful resource.



COVID-19

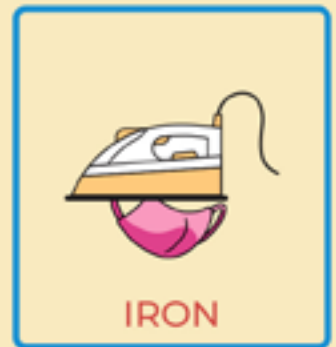
WEARING A MASK IS HIGHLY ADVISABLE



WASH



DRY



IRON

BUT WEAR THEM CORRECTLY



With Contributions from the editorial committee