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Positive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa: A progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

RACHIDI ABOUDOU¹, JACOB AFOUDA YABI², MARTIN PAUL JR. TABE-OJONG³, MOHAMED NASSER BACO²

¹*AfricaRice, Policy, Innovation Systems, and Impact Assessment Program (PII), Côte d'Ivoire*

²*University of Parakou, Lab. of Analysis and Research on the Economic and Social Dynamics, Benin*

³*World Bank Group, United States*

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted significant challenges worldwide, yet emerging evidence suggests that Africa has experienced positive impacts during the crisis. We examine the extant literature on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa. Utilizing a systematic search strategy, this study identified and synthesized findings from relevant studies published between 2020 and 2024 on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A systematic review was conducted of published studies that reported a positive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa using the preferred reporting items for systematic and meta-analysis (PRISMA) protocol. This review highlights various areas where the pandemic has catalyzed positive changes, including healthcare innovation, technological advancement, economic resilience, and community solidarity. While the pandemic has predominantly been associated with negative consequences such as economic downturns, food insecurity, healthcare challenges, and social disruptions, there is growing recognition of the positive impacts it has brought about in various spheres of life across the African continent. Environmental improvements have been observed in various aspects, such as reduction in pollution levels and improvement of air quality. In addition, we observed strengthened family bonds, an increase in quality time spent together, an improvement in work-life balance, an acceleration of the adoption of online learning, an encouragement of local entrepreneurship, an acceleration of digital transformation, an increase in the use of telemedicine, an improvement in connectivity and access to information, strengthened sense of community solidarity, and increased focus on mental well-being. These positive impacts highlight the contribution of the COVID-19 pandemic to the development of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). Understanding these positive effects is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders to leverage opportunities for sustainable development and resilience in the face of future challenges in Africa and elsewhere.

Keywords: Africa, COVID-19 pandemic, economy, healthcare, positive impact, Sustainable Development Goals, technology