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How can the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects be used as an opportunity for enhancing resilience and structural transformation, in LDCs, LLDCs and Africa? (3 mins)

Introduction

COVID-19 threatens to undermine gains in efforts made to enhance resilience, socio-economic development and structural transformation with implications for the SDGs, Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063. Although the burden of mortality falls on the older population, the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic are felt by the younger population and vulnerable groups (people living with disability, HIV, etc...). Today, I want to opine in my remarks, lessons and opportunities inherent to the pandemic towards building and enhancing resilience and structural transformation, in LDCs, LLDCs and Africa.

Lessons

1. **“No man is an Island” and by extension, no country is on its own.** The COVID-19 pandemic brings stronger to the fore the realization that Africa, as a continent, consequently, is affected by global imperatives, whether good or bad. We cannot beat this virus without global cooperation. This requires that we be abreast with global tools and systems, as we are exposed to pressures and challenges that require innovation, rapid or flexible responses and adaptable strategies towards resilience.
2. **Public trust in resilience and structural transformation initiatives is a government’s most valuable asset.** Countries in which public trust in governments was relatively high had fewer resistances to mitigation measures and consequently huge advantages for collective gain. Countries, where citizens had little trust in governments, had to sometimes employ fear and intimidation which resulted in backlashes and further erased gains. It is important, particularly in LDCs and LLDCs, to strengthen weak governments and increase public trust to support the implementation of resilience and structural transformation initiatives.
3. **Proactive development focused on resilience alone (without a holistic approach to wellbeing and broader development needs) is counter-productive.** It has been proven in this pandemic that resilience across the continent is threatened by inequality and austerity measures. Inequality across populations and political-economic policies being rolled out to reduce government budget deficits reduce resilience in LDCs and LLDCs and on the African continent. Particularly, a lack of and or weak social protection systems in some countries has been exposed. It is thus important that broader development needs and population wellbeing be considered in enhancing resilience.

Opportunities

The African Covid-19 experiences highlight the value of bold actions on issues of inclusiveness, wellbeing, equality, and resilience.

1. COVID-19 has created an opportunity for governments to intentionally engage communities in Africa on ambitious transformational and resilience initiatives. The initiatives for development should be proactive, informed by data-based micro-planning, inclusiveness and equality, sustainability and continuous assessment and evaluation of delivery.

2. Post COVID-19, interventions and development initiatives that build on regional and national development plans should be strategic, focused, non-duplicated and should leverage on resilience-based development.
3. As the crisis overly stretches the resources available to African economies, governments should engage more with civil society and local communities to support the social, economic and health needs of the most affected and build or strengthen public trust. Such engagements are crucial to building resilience so that it becomes the bedrock of sustainable development.
4. The voices and contribution of the youth in Africa are critical in shaping the narrative for building back better Africa's economic and social fabric. COVID-19 has shown that young people in Africa are very innovative and the fostering of innovation, entrepreneurship and technology to transform challenges of COVID-19 into opportunities is, therefore, key for dialogue. There are tremendous opportunities this would bring, if the youth are supported to work in more collective groups, instead of individualised responses.
5. Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for African Union Member States (and RECs) to rethink the development trajectories for the continent. Now, is the right time to act and refocus our attention on policy reforms to ensure effectiveness and to promote the drivers of wellbeing. The measurement of our development successes should extend beyond GDP and include wellbeing, job creation, resilience, inclusiveness, and equity.

I thank you.