



a world class African city

Marang

International Relations Newsletter

13 Issue



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Dear Readers,

Africa's diplomats seem to have adjusted swiftly to the new coronavirus reality of conducting business online. This is visible in the flurry of virtual consultations taking place among decision-makers to chart common ways forward. Similar interactions are taking place in many regional and sub-regional groupings.

The shift to online diplomacy will likely outlast the Covid-19 pandemic, requiring, in an African context, greater investment in infrastructure to support fast and reliable connectivity and renewed attention to cybersecurity.

Our 13th edition casts the spotlight on this issue, including service delivery innovations which took place during the national lockdown.

We delineate opportunities, challenges and successes faced by local governments during the Covid-19 pandemic and highlight best practices that can be benchmarked by peer cities and partners. We also share some inspirational news about the "new normal."

Some cities have developed a toolkit for resilient recovery and can place agile and evidence-based support processes for Covid-19. This includes the recent launch of the Voluntary Local Reviews Series, which aims to highlight that localisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is important considering the current normalcy.

The "eLearning Lockdown Video" series run by CoJ Libraries enables librarians to give tips on different subjects and online content relevant for education, business and personal development. The platform has reached over 15 000 video views since its introduction recently.

FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

We hope you enjoy the read!

Joburg displays resilience in face of **Covid-19** pandemic



Joburgers are a people of hope, whose resilience has been on exhibition throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, which despite its wrath, has failed to bring domineering and untold despair to people of our City. This is the sentiment of the Executive Mayor, Cllr Geoff Makhubo, who outlines Covid-19's impact on Johannesburg since the lockdown over five months ago:

What service delivery challenges have been brought about by Covid-19?

The delivery of services is never isolated from other economic and resource realities. It should be a common course that the pandemic had a severe impact on lives and livelihoods. The economy of the City has been impacted badly and many jobs have been lost and businesses forced to close as a result.

Covid-19 has also meant that virtually every municipal entity has had to work with skeleton staff either because of national government regulations or because staff became

infected with the virus. Some tasks, such as filling potholes, as an example, are labour intensive and cannot be done from home like other administrative functions.

Other functions were declared non-essential and had to be suspended, and some budgets previously allocated to them had to be redirected to mitigate the adverse impact of Covid-19.

What successes and innovations has the City come up with to deal with Covid-19?

On the positive side, Covid-19 has sharpened our Emergency Preparedness. Local governments need strong disaster preparedness and emergency management systems that can identify vulnerable pockets and respond to challenges quickly. We need to be ready instead of getting ready.

How has Covid-19 impacted the City's finances?

The City's revenue has been directly affected by the reality of the slowdown of the economy as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown. With many households and businesses unable to meet their financial obligations, the City has under-collected revenue to the tune of R2, 9 billion Rands. This made it necessary to strike a balance between continued service delivery supply and demand on a shoe-string budget.

What assistance, if any, has the City received from its partners during Covid-19?

The City of Joburg is grateful for the partnership between itself and the national as well as provincial governments. We have also seen how big business has come to the party and made meaningful and essential contributions that have helped the people of our City fight the pandemic.

Provincial Health is procuring the drugs, which will assist in detoxification of Opioid users if methadone is available at our homeless facilities.

The national Department of Social Development has funded Meals on Wheels to provide three meals per day at all our recreational centres, which cater for up to 1 800 people daily. The national Department of Social Development has availed 3 000 blankets, 570 dignity packs and 10 25 litres of hand sanitizers for our homeless shelters.

The national Department of Water and Sanitation provided 434 water tanks and has committed to donating 20 handwashing facilities through Water AID as the means of its Covid-19 hygiene behavioural change message, which will be drummed up in informal settlements with the support of Joburg Water.

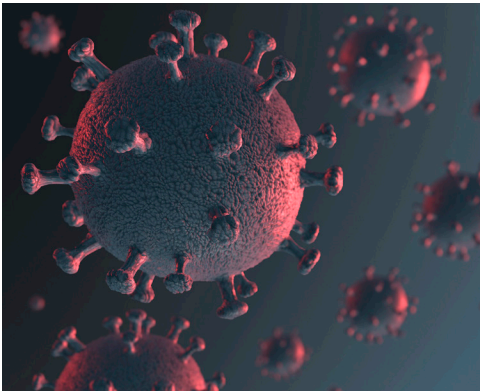
Sanitation solutions company, Each EaziWash supplied 2 x 5L anti-Bacterial Soap Dispensers fitted with Self Cleansing and Self Closing Tip Tap Valves. The 20 EaziWash systems will be installed in the following identified 20 priority informal settlements across the City once consultations with RDs have been concluded. It should be noted that some sites might be changed based on the availability of infrastructure.

What is the City's message to the world in these challenging times?

Human history is littered with episodes of misfortune, some of it natural, others self-made or a combination of factors. We have seen earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The Bubonic Plaque of the 14th century is estimated to have caused the deaths of up to 200 million people in Europe and parts of Asia. In Africa, the crop-destroying swarms of locusts are an ever-present threat.

Through all this, humankind continues to find new ways of fighting diseases and mitigating against their impact where a cure is not yet known. Joburgers are a people of hope and we know that if we put our minds and collective shoulder to this wheel, we shall prevail in the end. We dare not give in to despair.

C40 Covid -19 special updates



The recently published C40 situation report and bulletin indicate that in Europe, Covid-19 cases are increasing in Spain, Germany and France while Eastern Europe and the Balkans are also experiencing a steep surge. England had the highest levels of excess deaths during the first wave of the pandemic, while among larger cities, Madrid experienced the highest death rate.

In Mumbai, random testing has found that more than half of the residents in peri-urban settlements had antibodies to the novel coronavirus, in contrast with 16% of residents living elsewhere in the same areas.

Medical journal, The Lancet has warned that the Covid-19 pandemic is undermining nutrition across the world due to the disruption of food systems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The worst consequences are borne by young children.

The UN has cautioned that rising unemployment in Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia could force tens of millions of people into poverty. Restrictions in Jakarta have been extended for the third time as the city's test positivity rate remains above the figure recommended by the World Health Organisation (**WHO**).

Cases are surging in Melbourne and the state of Victoria has ordered all residents to wear masks in public. In the US, case numbers are also on the rise. One person in the US dies every minute, although deaths from coronavirus remain below their peak. New measures have been implemented in Hong Kong to control the spread of the virus following a spike in infections. South Korea, Japan and the Philippines are also continuing to report new infections. China has also seen its biggest daily rise in cases since the peak.

Cases continue to accelerate in Africa, with seven countries that have eased lockdowns experiencing a 20% rise in new infections in recent weeks. Lockdowns are being imposed in parts of Libya while Morocco and the Republic of Congo are among countries to have re-imposed restrictions following a resurgence. Case numbers remain high in South Africa, which represents around half of the continent's total infections.

(Source: C40: August 2020).

World celebrates **Metropolitan Day 2020**



Cities across the globe commemorated the World Metropolitan Day on the 7th October 2020, the anniversary of the Montréal Declaration on Metropolitan Areas. Each year, on this day, cities observe the metropolitan nature of many territories worldwide. For spaces where greatest transformations take place –affecting at least a third part of the global population, including 60% of the world’s urban residents – cities promote cooperation to achieve sustainable and integrative territorial development.

This year has made visible how complex and fragile metropolitan spaces are. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic is having - and will have - consequences on all dimensions of life in metropolises, but it is also triggering opportunities to rethink the role of metropolitan governance in emergencies.

Covid-19 affected people living in urban agglomerations with no relation to the jurisdictional and municipal boundaries, making those borders even more visible, if not vulnerable. In this context, the #WorldMetropolitanDay2020 provides the occasion to discuss challenges and opportunities’ metropolises have in addressing the world’s premier crisis.

(Source: Metropolis: August 2020).

Joburg attends inaugural **C40 Mayor’s webinar**



The maiden C40 Africa Mayoral webinar provided a platform for African Mayors to discuss Covid-19 recovery within the context of financial resilience, inclusion, job creation and low-carbon growth.

The webinar was hosted by C40 vice-Chair for Africa and Mayor of Accra in Ghana, Adjei Sowah as well as Mxolisi Kaunda, the Mayor of eThekweni municipality. The event provides mayors and political leaders in African cities with the opportunity to share crucial knowledge and experiences about combatting Covid-19.

The webinar thrashed the following topics:

- What type of economic impact and opportunities are we seeing in African cities?
- What global and regional stimulus’ packages are relevant to African cities?
- What do green jobs and a green investment look like in an African context?
- How can cities ensure that they tap into existing financing opportunities for their Covid-19 recovery plans?

The following key personalities participated in the webinar:

- Mayor of Los Angeles and C40 Chair, Eric Garcetti
- Mayor of Joburg, Geoff Makhubo
- Mayor of Accra, Adjei Sowah
- Mayor of Durban, Mxolisi Kaunda
- Mayor of Freetown, Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr
- Lead Administrator of Tshwane, Mpho Nawa
- Deputy Mayor of the City of Dakar and President of the Sustainable Development Commission, Ndiouga Sakho
- Mayoral Committee Member for Spatial Planning and

- Environment of Cape Town, Alderman Marian Nieuwoudt
- Manager for the Urban Development Division, Infrastructure and Urban Development Department (PICU) African Development Bank, Stefan Atchia
- Regional Technical Advisor for the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), Dmitry Pozhidaev
- Coordinator of the Green Jobs Programme for the International Labour Organization Moustapha, Kamal Gueye

Makhubo pays courtesy call to **Ambassador Kionka**



The Executive Mayor, Cllr. Geoff Makhubo recently placed a virtual courtesy call to the European Union (EU) Ambassador to South Africa, H.E. Riina Kionka to discuss Joburg/EU relations.

The two also interacted about the hosting of a virtual City of Joburg and EU Diplomatic Corps meeting and deliberated on other possible opportunities for future collaborations.

During her appointment in October last year, the Detroit born Kionka reflected that her overarching task in South Africa is to represent the EU and its policies and to be the eyes and ears of Brussels.

Makhubo pays courtesy call to **Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps**



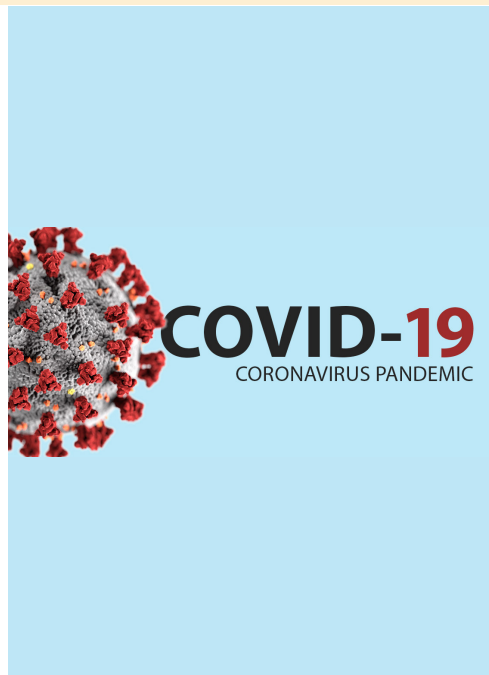
In line with building a World Class African City, the Executive Mayor, Cllr Geoff Makhubo met with the Ambassador of Eritrea: H.E. Sali Omar Abdu and the Nigerian High Commissioner to South Africa: H.E. Kabiru Bala to discuss future collaborations between members of the African diplomatic corps.

Makhubo pays courtesy call to the **Ambassador of Palestine**



Cllr Makhubo met with Palestinian Ambassador to South Africa, H.E. Hanan Jarrar to broaden and strengthen bilateral relations between Joburg and Palestine. The meeting solidified ties and built solidarity as well as mutual support between the two.

International lessons on resilient recovery from Covid-19



For instance, the second wave of infections in Melbourne, Australia, has shown how communities are effectively using their knowledge and capacity to communicate and provide resources to vulnerable people, highlighting the efficiency of utilising community networks to identify different languages and cultures, and their proficiency in translating key public health messages.

The briefing also indicates that businesses have a key role to play in recovery and renewal as they continue to support local communities, supply chains, staff, and wider stakeholders. However, business also faces challenges protecting staff and communities at work, protecting jobs and livelihoods as economies falter, and overcoming the immediate impact of a shortage of accredited staff as training and re-accreditation facilities are put on hold.

Wastewater-based disease research groups in Australia, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the USA have reportedly detected traces of Covid-19 in wastewater. Integrating sewer surveillance and wastewater inspections into systems for Covid-19 monitoring can provide information on potential transmission pathways and improve the early warning of new outbreaks.

Each week the University of Manchester brings together relevant international practices and examples of recovery from Covid-19. The weekly briefing is curated by the Global Resilient Cities Network (GRCN) to bring key lessons and examples targeted for resilience officers, emergency planners, and other city practitioners. The structure of the briefing follows the City Resilience Framework – the four drivers that cities have identified as mattering the most when facing a wide range of chronic problems or a sudden catastrophe - health and wellbeing, economy and society, infrastructure and environment and leadership and strategy.

As cities analyse the potential of future waves of the pandemic, there is an opportunity to reconsider the need for redundancy, or spare capacity across organisations and systems (food and healthcare) and where demand for important services could exceed available capacity during recovery e.g. provision of mental health support, financial advice, unemployment services, retraining, and the potential need for spare capacity on an ongoing basis after the crisis lessens

In the recent briefing, GRCN highlighted the role communities are playing in communicating urgent public health messages to vulnerable people within their own networks; how wastewater surveillance is being used to identify new outbreaks of Covid-19; and the value of spare capacity (redundancy) across organisations and systems as businesses and government seek to maintain operations through current and future waves of the pandemic and into recovery.

(Source: Global Resilient Cities Network: August 2020).

IFLA Global Library Field Series recognises CoJ Libraries



International
Federation of
Library
Associations and
Institutions

The City's library directorate has been recognised by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) for its digital exploits during the Covid-19 crisis.

The IFLA acknowledged the City on its Global Library Field online series for the "eLearning Lockdown Video" series on its Facebook page since April 2020. IFLA is a leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users.

The IFLA committee listed the City's libraries and their calendar on the eLearning Lockdown Video series on its website, (<https://www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-libraries>) for other countries to access and learn from it. The video series <https://www.facebook.com/JoburgLibraries/>, which involves librarians giving tips on different activities and online content relevant for education, business and personal development, has reached more than 15 000 video views since its introduction.

Joburg gears up for virtual **Urban 20 Mayor's summit**



The City of Joburg is participating actively in finalising the Urban 20 (U20) cities Communique, as Mayors from the world's largest economies gear up towards the annual summit in September 2020.

The City recently participated in a virtual second annual U20 Sherpa meeting, which focused on:

- Whitepaper outputs across three thematic taskforces and detailed policy recommendations
- Finalisation of the U20 Communique
- Discussions on initial recommendations from the Special Working Group on Covid-19 and
- Deliberations on the draft agenda of the U20 Mayors Summit.

The meeting brought together Cities from G20 member states, known as the Urban 20 (U20) to reflect on evidence-based policy recommendations. In order to formulate a unified response to pressing challenges cities around the world face during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, U20 Chair Fahd Al-Rasheed convened a U20 Special Working Group co-chaired by the cities of Buenos Aires, New York and Rome. The cities of Amsterdam, Helsinki, Houston, Izmir, Los Angeles, Madrid, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Tshwane were participants.

The U20 Special Working Group urges participating cities to support efforts of tackling global challenges by responding to a survey on the impact of Covid-19 on each city. While the focus of the survey is on financial issues, it covers impacts on people's overall well-being and livelihoods, the ability of local governments to operate and maintain public services during the pandemic, and criteria for policy decisions and budget prioritisations in response to financial challenges. The City of Joburg took the survey, whose responses will be used to formulate well-informed policy.

The U20 Mayor's Summit takes place from Wednesday, 30 September to Friday, 2 October 2020.

Toolkit for resilient recovery

The Global Resilient Cities Network (GRCN) has developed a toolkit for resilient recovery to support cities and local governments in establishing agile and evidence-based plans against the Covid-19 pandemic.

The toolkit draws on over six years of experience and presents several tools to support local authorities in integrating best practices and resilience principles in their recovery plans and investment portfolios. GRCN's toolkit for resilient recovery aims to provide a foundation for cities to create their own recovery strategies and use a combination of tools to support decision making. The suite of tools considers four iterative activities that include: assessing and analysing the situation, defining a portfolio of action, improving the proposals, and deepening learning.

The toolkit is available here <https://www.resilientcitiesnetwork.org/toolkit-resilient-recovery>.

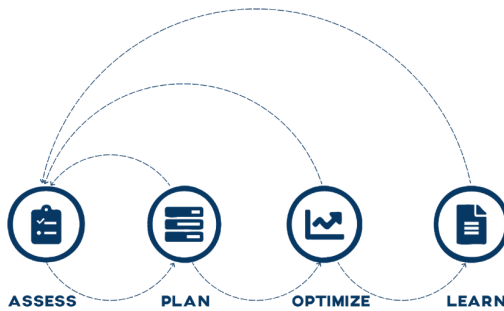


Figure 1: Four iterative activities underpinning GRCN's Toolkit for a Resilient Recovery

The GRCN cities and partners, including Greater Manchester, the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Institute of Urban Affairs of India had an opportunity to share in a webinar, how they are responding to challenges of Covid-19 and how their learning is captured in the toolkit. This includes identifying new or existing weaknesses (vulnerable populations, declining economy); strengths (building hospitals, existing food banks) and opportunities for change and renewal (improved testing and tracing, climate change adaptation). The value of collaboration and evidence-based systems and processes is highlighted.

As several cities around the world move towards recovery, an important distinction has been made – short-term transactional plans and activities are required to respond to the immediate crisis the world finds itself in today. Where renewal requires ambitious, transformational planning informed by long-term strategy, allowing cities to be in a better, is needed to build better lives for all.

City-Region observatory a repository of Covid-19 knowledge

The Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) is mapping and analysing data on Covid-19 vulnerability and the spread of infections to mitigate future outbreaks and avert further risks associated with the pandemic.

The organisation is also providing direct support to clinicians and district administrations who are tracking infections in key sites across the province, studying community cases and trends in care facilities. GCRO's pandemic response work is conducted by a compact team of specialists, which provides substantial assistance to Gauteng's municipalities to facilitate data access, use and analysis.

A knowledge repository which aggregates local government data for the use of state entities, business, labour, civil society and citizens, GCRO helps the Gauteng province make informed decisions. The institution — which is a conglomeration of the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand, the Gauteng Provincial Government and organised local governments in Gauteng (SALGA-Gauteng) — collects data for academic research and policy analysis.

GCRO's Executive Director, Dr Rob Moore, has been appointed to the Gauteng Premier's Covid-19 Advisory Committee, set up to improve response planning. "One of GCRO's core strengths has always been mapping and spatial analysis and has contributed to several initiatives in this regard," says Dr Moore.

GCRO has provided the City's Development Planning Department with mapping data on the impact of Covid-19 to help direct the distribution of food parcels in Joburg. GCRO also supports the Solidarity Fund in national food distribution efforts by mapping high priority wards across the country based on an index of multiple deprivations and the presence of civil society organisations involved in food distribution. This enables the covering of gaps in key areas of need.

Dr Moore says the organisation also aids communities to maintain preventative hygiene and social distancing by distributing basic emergency services such as water tanks, where taps and toilets are shared among many households.

What Covid-19 insights has GCRO shared with local governments so far?

At the onset of the pandemic, the GCRO March 2020 Map of the Month aimed to create a spatial understanding of the localised risk factors that might contribute to the spread of Covid-19 and amplify its health and socio-economic impact, in Gauteng communities. The maps explored two key themes: (1) multiple risk factors to maintaining basic preventative hygiene and social distancing; and (2) multiple risk factors in the context of major shutdowns and potential outbreaks. In response to lockdown conditions and the need for rapid response, the GCRO developed a new kind of policy-relevant output called Data Insight, to provide clear and rapid access to data and analysis. Data Insight takes the form of a presentation, providing insight on spatial data and trends in an accessible format that can be easily shared across digital platforms. GCRO's research is available on its website on a dedicated Covid-19 webpage: <https://www.gcro.ac.za/research/project/detail/responding-Covid-19-pandemic-Gauteng/>.

The logo for the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) is displayed in white on a dark red background. The letters 'GCRO' are in a large, bold, sans-serif font. To the right of 'GCRO', the words 'Gauteng', 'City-Region', and 'Observatory' are stacked vertically in a smaller, lighter font, separated by a vertical line.

Which service delivery issues have emerged during the Covid-19 survey?

A key framing concept in GCRO's initial mapping of vulnerability to Covid-19 was that of 'syndemics', a concept in public health which recognises that it is not sufficient to be concerned only with the disease itself - an epidemic may interact with other diseases in conjunction with social, spatial, environmental and economic factors that facilitate its spread and compound its impact. In turn, epidemics may exacerbate the health impacts and developmental consequences of these other diseases and socio-economic issues. It is useful to think about service delivery issues through this syndemic lens.

Since shared community water points and toilets could be a key point of transmission risk, Covid-19 focuses attention on communities that do not have piped water and sanitation to each home. Through a syndemic perspective, poor access to water and sanitation is a Covid-19 transmission risk factor. So, over the last five months, local governments in Gauteng have been working together to provide underserved settlements with more water tanks and temporary toilets. How this gets done is important. For example, there have been stories of water tanks allocated to communities being grouped together at a single point rather than dispersed to different streets, and the schedule for refilling them not being adhered to. This has resulted in large groups of people milling around in central locations for long periods so that they do not miss the delivery of water. This increases rather than help reduce transmission risk.

Are there any socio-economic contradictions exposed by Covid-19 in communities?

GCRO's analysis of Covid-19 risks and different household characteristics revealed how vulnerabilities vary in relation to living arrangements. For example, residents in informal dwellings are less likely to have access to piped water and may struggle to achieve preventative hygiene. But they are also less likely to live in households suffering from pre-existing health conditions which exacerbate illness with Covid-19. Interventions and preventative measures need to be tailored and adapted in ways informed by local conditions and challenges.

One area where Covid-19 has exposed clear socio-economic contradictions is in employment, where we have seen schisms opening between different kinds of workers. The hard lockdown levels over April and May eliminated the opportunities to work for many business owners, both formal and (especially) informal. Many of these people have

been desperate to return to work to earn a living, regardless of the health risks. Many working professionals have found new ways of working from home. Their access to computers and good Internet connections has protected both their incomes and health. Then there are many technical, service, administrative and support employees in both the public and private sectors whose salaries have been largely protected over lockdown, and who perceive significant health risks in any return to the physical workplace. The interests of these different employment fractions do not necessarily coincide, with the livelihoods of the most vulnerable becoming even precarious.

There is also a paradoxical set of contradictions in the health risks faced by those who do have employment and those who are unemployed. Again, having employment, especially in jobs that require a commute and presence in the workplace exposes people to more risk of contracting Covid-19. By contrast, since not having to travel to work or be in a workplace means less risk, higher rates of joblessness in some parts of the City may act as something of a shield against Covid-19 transmission for certain communities.

What steps must local government undertake to address the negative impact of Covid-19 on communities?

As a first principle, the local government must insist on much greater levels of co-operative governance in all areas. It makes no sense for national and provincial governments to each, separately, track the spread of Covid-19, only to then refuse to share that work with municipalities who must start from scratch to identify spatial trends. Similarly, it makes no sense for a national process of distributing food parcels through the Solidarity Fund to happen without reference to information being collected through a provincial hotline on where the need is, and then for municipalities to have their own separate food security interventions. Other countries have done much better than South Africa in combatting Covid-19 through an aligned all-of-government response. Public transport is a key area of concern during the pandemic because of its associated risks of Covid-19 transmission. However, affordable and sustainable public transport systems will be critical to the future of the Gauteng City-Region as well as assisting with rebuilding economic activity. All spheres of government must work together to ensure that public transport is affordable, safe, accessible and efficient.

What different kinds of transitions could happen over time, as well as the effects that they may have on governance and sustainability in local government?

In considering the effects on governance and sustainability of local government, there are both positive and negative transitions underway. On the positive side, governance has arguably been strengthened in several ways during the pandemic due to greater levels of collaboration and coordination. As far as possible this should be continued. In addition, the pandemic has highlighted the value of accurate and open data and GCRO has been instrumental in enabling the sharing and comparison of data.

On the negative side, the pandemic is likely to have a very severe and lasting impact on the economy and on municipal revenue streams. The economic downturn resulting from lockdown is likely to impact households and business' ability to pay municipal bills. Over the longer term, there will likely be effects from a dramatic transition to more work-from-home arrangements and online shopping triggered by Covid-19. There is anecdotal evidence that key commercial nodes have been emptied out with companies shifting their workforces to home-offices and proposing to maintain these arrangements even post Covid-19. Shopping centres are also being depleted with much lower footfall, tenants defaulting on rentals and a growing number of vacancies. This is likely to put the brakes on commercial and retail development over the medium to longer-term, impacting on municipal revenue in turn.

Joburg librarian clinches Wikipedia's Edit-a-thon



A City of Joburg librarian, Matete Lesele from Randburg has scooped the honours of being the only South African among top 50 librarians to edit a high number of articles on Wikipedia.

Five librarians from Johannesburg libraries took part in the African Librarians Week, which highlights the importance of helping fill gaps in African literature on Wikipedia by adding content and missing references to articles about the continent on the online encyclopaedia. The initiative aims to create reliable African content on Wikipedia for the benefit of global readers.

Lesele took home the honours and a certificate of recognition at the event hosted by the African Library and Information Associations and Institution (AfLIA) in collaboration with the Wikimedia Foundation. An independent international not-for-profit organisation, AfLIA pursues the interests of library and information associations, library and information services, librarians and information workers and related communities.

Makhubo commended for exemplary leadership during Covid-19 outbreak



FAST-TRACK CITIES

The second annual Fast-Track Cities conference has held robust discussions about the importance of bolstering urban HIV responses within the context of circumventing Covid-19 infections.

The two-hour virtual conference follows on the heels of the successful hosting of the inaugural one in London last year. The Executive Mayor, Cllr Geoff Makhubo attended the meeting alongside a high-level panel of Mayors of Atlanta, Paris, Quezon City, and São Paulo.

As one of the keynote speakers, Cllr Makhubo has been commended for exemplary leadership during the Covid-19 lockdown in Johannesburg. Conference discussions were moderated by the Mayor of Lisbon, Fernando Medina and had local stakeholders from across the 300+ Fast-Track Cities network.

According to its website, the Fast-Track Cities initiative is a global partnership between cities and municipalities across the world and four core partners – the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and the City of Paris. Mayors and other public officials designate their municipalities as Fast-Track Cities by working towards zero new HIV infections and zero AIDS-related deaths.

eThekwini spurs Joburg to implement Climate Action Plan



The urgency to do things differently to transform cities has spurred the City of Joburg's passion to develop, endorse and implement a Climate Action Plan (CAP) by the end of December 2020 in a bid to create a pathway towards carbon neutrality and climate resilience by 2050.

Joburg hopes to emulate the City of eThekwini, which recently developed its Climate Action Plan, which builds on the 2015 Durban Climate Change Strategy aimed at addressing transformation.

It is also envisaged that the CAP will be a City-wide action plan inextricably linked to eradicating poverty and increasing inclusiveness. The CAP will raise living standards at a faster rate by following a low-carbon development path, reducing inequality and driving better environmental outcomes.

A mandatory requirement for all C40 Cities, CAP is projected to become the City's strategic climate plan designed to prioritise evidence-based transformational actions to mitigate carbon emissions and work towards having a net-zero carbon footprint within the next three decades. The adoption of the CAP will be assessed annually.

EThekwini celebrated the completion of its CAP through a digital seminar attended by high-level government officials, C40 officials and mayors from 11 African C40 cities represented in the C40 CAP Africa programme, including Johannesburg, Abidjan, Accra, Addis Ababa, Cape Town, Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Durban, Lagos, Tshwane and Nairobi. The Executive Mayor, Geoff Makhubo led the Joburg delegation.

All C40 Cities are developing their own Climate Action Plans.

Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) nudge cities towards SDG progress



United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) have launched the first volume of Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of the VLR Series to highlight the importance of localising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development considering Covid-19.

The launch was a virtual event on the side-lines of the 2020 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which emphasises the increased need to ensure no one and no place is left behind in the aftermath of the global pandemic.

The VLR Series provides guidance, definitions, and technical support to local and regional governments to engage in the VLR process, which affords local governments a platform to confirm their commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and voluntarily assess progress toward specific targets. Global communities that have developed VLRs include New York City, Madrid, Moscow, Oaxaca, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Barcelona.

During the launch event, **Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, UN-Habitat Executive Director, emphasised the need to empower cities and local governments through spatially disaggregated data and enough resources and called for integrating VLRs into the VNR process.

Penny Abeywardena, New York City's (NYC) Commissioner for International Affairs, says NYC is currently looking into charting more equitable future pathways as the city recovers from Covid-19. She notes VLRs will be increasingly critical to the recovery process. She urges policymakers to use the SDGs as a common framework when rebuilding societies and economies.

Pablo Fernández, UCLG, notes the VLR Guidelines use the first 40 VLRs presented as a basis for analysis.

Edgardo Bilsky, UCLG, adds that the VLR Guidelines analyse existing VLRs and extract key components, features, and impacts to help other local and regional governments develop VLRs.

Shipra Narang, UN-Habitat, notes that the UN-Habitat will organise an Expert Group Meeting, in collaboration with the Madrid City Council, on strengthening the VLR process by the end of 2020.

Santiago Saura, Madrid's Councillor for International Affairs and Cooperation, notes the City began developing a strategy that is localising the SDGs in coordination with the national government.

Gregory Maltsev, Moscow Urban Forum Research Centre, says Moscow began conducting research for its first VLR, with support from the UN-Habitat.

Yolanda Martínez, Secretary of Social and Human Development, State of Oaxaca, Mexico, underscores the importance of stakeholder engagement in local policy development.

Luiz Alvaro Salles, Secretary of International Affairs, City of São Paulo, Brazil, announced the launch of his city's SDG localisation report. He emphasises the need for sustainability principles when planning Covid-19 recovery.

Undersecretary for International Affairs, City of Buenos Aires, Argentina, **Francisco Resnicoff** says VLRs provide a roadmap for coordination among local government units. Noting that cities are on the frontlines of the Covid-19 response, he says Buenos Aires is working on its second VLR, which aims to incorporate the impact of Covid-19 on the city.

Marilia Sorrini Peres Ortiz, Deputy Secretary of Planning, Niteroi, a city in southeast Brazil, says Niteroi's VLR focuses, inter alia, on participatory planning, housing, transportation, health, and access to land.

Steven Heddle from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), notes the SDGs have been embedded in Scotland's national performance framework. He says municipalities need resources to develop capacity to effectively work across government units and institutions.

Miquel Rodriguez, Barcelona's Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda, explains that the city set local SDG targets and key performance indicators, which the local government will adopt by September 2020.

Amson Sibanda, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, highlights the increased importance of VLRs as the international community embarks on a Decade of Action during which it must also "build back better" after Covid-19. Summarising takeaways from the discussion, he mentions no "one size fits all" exists when it comes to VLRs. He says VLRs are not only a tool for monitoring and evaluation, but they also facilitate social inclusion, multi-level coordination, and prioritisation in planning and budgeting.

(Source: UCLG: August 2020).

Africa's Covid-19 diplomacy reflects its commitment to multilateralism and collective action



AFRICAN UNION

Africa's diplomatic system has adjusted swiftly to the new coronavirus (Covid-19) reality of conducting business. This is visible in the flurry of virtual consultations among decision-makers to chart common ways forward. The high number of African Union (AU)-led consultations over the past few months reflect a deep-seated conviction that collective action is the best way to address Africa's challenges effectively.

The dire scenario regarding the Covid-19 health impact in Africa that many dreaded has not, for now, materialised, even though the number of cases presently seems to be on a rapid upward trajectory. While the available figures remain low compared to other regions, there is an awareness that Africa should stay on high alert, given how quickly the virus has spread in countries with much stronger health systems.

Unsurprisingly for Africa, the most devastating consequences are likely to be socio-economic. African economies are overwhelmingly dominated by the informal sector, which has borne the brunt as a result of restrictive measures taken to fight the pandemic, plunging millions into deeper poverty. The formal sector has also been adversely affected.

Compounding matters further is the global economic recession, which has led to reduced demand for Africa's commodities that form the bulk of its exports, grounded tourism and aviation-related activities, and decreased remittances from the diaspora. The pandemic has also disrupted supply chains, leading to an increase in the price of imported food and other items. The collapse of the oil price has had a mixed impact, increasing pressure on countries that rely on oil for most of their foreign earnings, without any significant boost for importers, given the global economic downturn.

Only time will provide a clearer picture of the pandemic's overall impact on the continent. In the meantime, it is worth noting how swiftly Africa's diplomatic system has adjusted to the new reality of conducting business, as illustrated by the flurry of virtual consultations among decision-makers to chart common ways forward. Since March, the Bureau of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government – comprising five countries with a coordination role in between ordinary

sessions – has, with the participation of the AU Commission Chairperson, convened several online meetings, including some with regional economic communities.

Similar interactions have taken place in many regional and sub-regional groupings.

Like the rest of the world, the shift to online diplomacy will probably outlast the pandemic, requiring, in the African context, greater investments in infrastructure to support fast and reliable connectivity and renewed attention to cybersecurity. It remains to be seen how telecommuting, to which African international bureaucracies have resorted for business continuity, will evolve going forward.

The high number of consultations organised over the past few months reflects a deep-seated conviction that collective action is the best way to address Africa's challenges effectively. As part of its Covid-19 strategy, the AU has taken steps to enhance the capacity of its African Centre for Disease Control, to enable it to lead the continental fight against the pandemic.

Other AU steps include resource mobilisation for countries, with the establishment of a Response Fund to which the members of the Bureau of the Assembly alone initially pledged US\$11 million. The emphasis placed by the ongoing institutional reform on self-financing has spurred a new mind-set.

The AU has also engaged the African private sector – an initiative that was successfully piloted in the fight against the Ebola epidemic in West Africa a few years ago – leading to the creation of a Forum of African Business Leaders. Within that framework, the Africa Medical Supplies Platform has been launched to link countries with manufacturers to procure critical supplies. This is particularly important, given the scarcity of these supplies and their skyrocketing prices.

The AU has mobilised international solidarity, with emphasis on debt relief and the need for any vaccine against the virus to be made available to all. In this respect, the AU recently launched the Consortium for Covid-19 Vaccine Clinical Trial to secure more than 10 late-stage clinical trials on the continent by bringing together vaccine developers and funders, as well as relevant African organisations.

From the foregoing, Africa has fared rather well in terms of collective action. At a time when the multilateral system is facing one of its most challenging moments, the imperative for its rejuvenation cannot be overemphasised. For Africa, commitment to multilateralism is not purely a matter of principle, but also an issue of enlightened self-interest. Only in multilateral fora can the continent mitigate the imbalance that characterises the global distribution of power and ensure that its concerns are considered.

Africa's response has also involved other actors. Notable here is the role of Ethiopian Airlines, which has distributed testing and other equipment donated to Africa across the continent. Civil society organisations, intellectuals and other concerned citizens are also actively engaged. A key takeaway from these initiatives is the need for Africa to undertake structural reforms to address vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic and to regain its sovereignty.

As with any crisis, the current situation also constitutes an opportunity that the continent must seize. While Africa has shown a commitment to act collectively in confronting the pandemic, it is yet to be seen if this will translate into a renewed continental determination to confront head-on the underlying structural problems made so glaring by the pandemic, practically expedite integration and act purposefully in support of effective multilateralism. The period ahead should be closely monitored to get a sense of the direction of travel that will be taken.

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