

COVID-19 and SDGs in Africa: new frontiers and directions for STI policy

Date: 3 May 2021

Time: 12h30-14h00 GMT + 1

Platform: Zoom

Background

It is beyond question that the COVID-19 pandemic has jeopardised the very fabric of our societies like no other disaster in recent history, highlighting pre-existing fragilities in health systems, massive gaps in social protection nets and the detrimental effects of a milieu of social exclusionary forces. From a structural perspective, the UN comprehensive systems response offers a three-point guidance articulated under three strategic pillars: a) the health response b) safeguarding lives and livelihoods and c) a better post COVID-19 world, to collectively frame the direction of global STI policy development and implementation. Thus, COVID-19 has been more than just a wakeup call, serving as a front from which to build better preparedness, system responsiveness and resilience by addressing well-recognised fracture lines imposed by historic underfunding, poor priorities and system fragmentation.

Delving into the complexity of policy responses, it is critical to first acknowledge the multitude of unrelenting socio-economic, political, and geographic factors at play within and across sectors, contexts and settings. Furthermore, it is vital to be aware of the interaction of new casts of actors as a dynamic and versatile assemblage of 'actors, forces, interactions and relationships' that have converged on a common issue (COVID-19) to deliver indirectly on developmental goals. Moreover, the various emerging configurations of actors, networks and partnerships must be understood beyond the binary lens of public versus private, state versus and non-state, profit versus non-profit and top versus bottom.

In this session we will discuss the complexity presented during the time of COVID-19, exploring new approaches, new solutions, in ways that embrace rather than reduce uncertainty. We will discuss, the implication of COVID-19 on competing priorities and trade-offs between science, technology, and innovation (STI) and the SDGs at local, national, and sub-regional levels, with a focus on Africa. Moreover, we will explore examples of innovation in finance, and health such as diagnostic tests, treatment modalities, medical devices in relation to local translation, technological capabilities, and network building, as a requisite in achieving continental goals. Therefore, we ask questions on how African policymakers are better able to reimagine the continent's future in the face of pending future crises and come up with solutions that lead to transformative changes.

These insights from COVID-19 responses generate a range of compelling questions for low- and middle-income countries, exploring the dimensions of transformation and sustainable development, such as:

1. *What lessons on innovations, technologies, and finance have emerged from the COVID-19 response?*
2. *How can these lessons be harnessed to drive and deliver transformative development goals?*
3. *How and to what extent can the diverse lessons contribute towards resilience and equity on the continent?*

The session will be moderated by **Chux Daniels** from the Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU), University of Sussex

Panel:

- Embracing complexity in an uncertain world-STI policies and COVID-19 (University of Johannesburg, SPRU) -**Blanche Ting**
- Measuring STI in African countries in relation to development and SDG priorities (UNU-MERIT, Maastricht and SPRU)- **Tommaso Ciarli**
- Unpacking technologies and partnerships in Africa's COVID-19 response (SPRU)-**Vusumuzi Ncube**
- Highlighting financial innovations in support of the COVID-19 response (University of Stellenbosch, SPRU, Rabia Transitions Initiative)-**Chantal Naidoo**

This symposium, hosted by SPRU at the University of Sussex Business School, brings together policymakers, researchers and country representatives to explore these questions, opening up and advancing the development of pertinent STI research and policy agendas.