

Pandemic Risks Threaten Africa's Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Africa faces significant challenges in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, compounded by a rapidly growing population, demographic shift, and a host of socioeconomic and environmental issues. The population of Africa is projected to increase from 1.3 billion in 2020 to 2.5 billion in 2050¹. The continent's economic growth has already been sluggish over the past decade due to factors such as conflicts, famine, and various endemic and epidemic diseases, including Ebola, malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and diarrheal diseases. This large population increase will only further strain economic growth in the region. Health crises are exacerbated by weak health systems, primarily due to insufficient financial resources and acute shortages of healthcare workers. Despite the Abuja Declaration of 2001, where African leaders committed to allocating at least 15% of their GDP to healthcare, few countries have met this target. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the vulnerability of African nations, revealing significant impacts on populations, economies, and social structures. The pandemic, coupled with existing challenges like climate change, has further strained the continent's fragile health systems. Infectious diseases, particularly those thriving in severe climatic conditions, pose ongoing healthcare challenges. Addressing these issues through climate-resilient health systems, "One Health" approach is essential for improving life expectancy and fostering sustainable development.

We advocate a "One Health" approach to addressing disease surveillance, pandemic preparedness, and response. One Health is "a collaborative, multi-sectoral strategy aimed at achieving optimal health outcomes by recognizing the interconnectedness of people, animals, plants, and their shared environment." This approach is particularly crucial for combating emerging infectious diseases. Emerging and endemic zoonotic diseases pose a threat not only to the health of animals and humans but also to global health security. An estimated 60% of known infectious diseases and up to 75% of new or emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic in origin. Because zoonotic diseases represent critical threats to global health security, implementing robust disease surveillance, early warning systems, and climate action plans are vital components for redefining Africa's future. By integrating these strategies, African nations can enhance their resilience, achieve some, if not all the SDGs by 2030, and meet the objectives of the Africa Agenda 2063. We reviewed official government reports, analyses, and peer-reviewed articles to inform our analyses.
