

UPDATE OF COVID-19 IMPACT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs) IN NAMIBIA (BRIEFING SERIES 1 - MAY 2020)

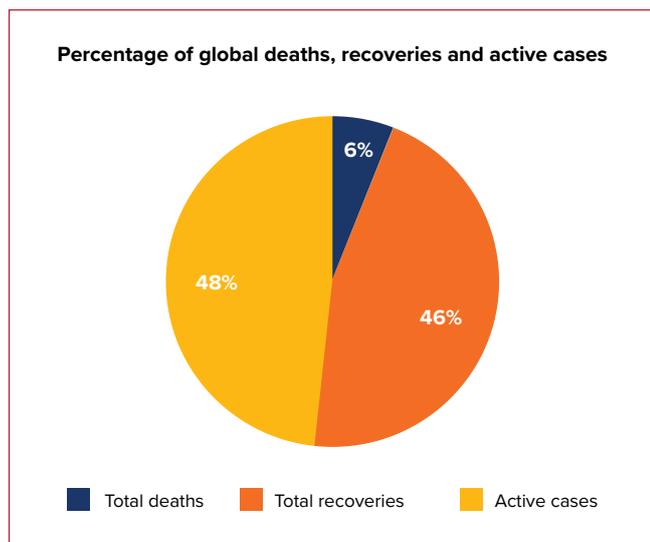
ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has affected almost all countries in the world in one way or another, including Namibia. This resulted in Namibia implementing a country-wide partial lockdown on 27 March 2020, following the announcement of a State of Emergency. The lockdown affected the already contracting Namibian economy coupled with commodity prices tumbling, the Rand depreciating against global major currencies (Namibian dollar pegged to the Rand), and negative consequences for the tourism sector, cargo flows, informal and formal traders. Several companies retrenched workers while others reduced salaries to cut costs and improve cash flows - which affected mostly low-income workers. Namibia is generally on track in terms of attaining the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the outbreak of COVID-19 poses serious challenges that threatens to reverse the gains already made on SDGs for example in reducing poverty, hunger and inequality. This Update (i.e. Briefing Series 1), is drawn from the "COVID-19 Impact on SDGs in Namibia" paper ([insert link to Main Paper plus Update \(Briefing Series 1\), here](#)), which was mainly informed by a desk-top review.

1 THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The COVID-19 has infected more than 6 million, killed more than 370 thousand people while over 2.8 million people have recovered with over 3 million active cases in 213 countries and territories around the world and 2 international conveyances. Figure 1 shows the percentage of global cases, deaths, recoveries and active cases as at 2 June 2020.

FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF GLOBAL DEATHS, RECOVERIES AND ACTIVE CASES AS AT 2 JUNE 2020

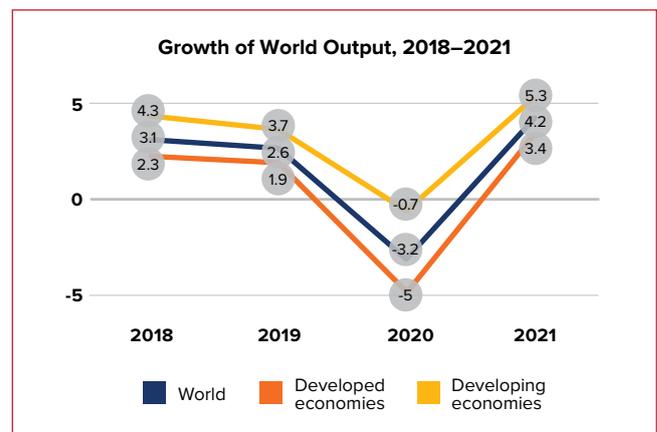


Source: Adapted from World Health Organisation, 2020

Figure 1 show that there are 6,384,205 total cases globally. Out of these cases, 6% (377,797) have died, 46% (2,920,953) have recovered while there are still 48% (3,085,455) active cases. Figure also shows that the global cases continue to increase, suggesting that many countries still have not managed to flatten the curve.

As result of COVID-19, the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is forecast to shrink by 3.2% in 2020, with only a gradual recovery in 2021. Cumulatively, the world economy is expected to lose nearly \$8.5 trillion in output in 2020 and 2021 according to United Nations (UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). Figure 2 present the growth of world output, 2018–2021.

FIGURE 2: GROWTH OF WORLD OUTPUT, 2018–2021



Source: Adapted from UN-DESA, 2020

Figure 2 show that the ongoing lockdown measures have significantly slowed the spread of the disease. Most countries, including major developed and developing economies, have started reopening their economies gradually although some form of social distancing remain in place. The global economic activities are expected to pick up steam later in the year, with fiscal and monetary stimulus successfully resuscitating demand. Higher levels of unemployment and negative balance sheet effects will, however, limit the strength of the recovery.

1.1 FINANCIAL MARKETS

Financial markets are experiencing extreme volatility, as uncertainties persisted and early efforts to contain the pandemic fell short of market expectations. Central banks have responded with interest rate cuts and asset purchases to inject liquidity, sustain credit flows and stabilize equity and bond prices. Increased risk aversion among investors triggered large capital outflows from many economies, leading to large currency depreciations and tighter credit conditions. Table 1 presents the latest major currency exchange rates as at 2 June 2020.

TABLE 1: MAJOR CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATES AS AT 2 JUNE 2020

Exchange Rates	1 June 2020	2 June 2020
N\$ / \$	17.35	17.46
N\$ / £	21.52	21.86
N\$ / €	19.33	19.41

Source: Bank of Namibia – 2 June 2020

Table 2 show that the Namibian dollar continue to depreciate against the major currencies. The exchange rate depreciation leads to price hikes and makes it very difficult for businesses that rely on imports to do business. Coupled with border closures as a result of COVID-19, the general prices levels will go up and may lead to inflation.

1.2 COMMODITY PRICES

Lockdowns have significantly curbed manufacturing output in the major hubs of world trade, including in China, Germany and the United States, which collectively account for around 34% of global manufacturing exports. Disruptions in major manufacturing hubs have weakened demand for intermediate inputs, base metals and minerals, leading to sharp declines in their price. Smaller manufacturing developing economies are facing a sharp decline in exports amid falling demand in developed economies. Extremely commodity-dependent countries (with more than 80% of export earnings derived from commodities), given their high dependence on highly volatile external flows, are among the most vulnerable developing countries. Commodity prices dropped in early 2020, as the pandemic shocks global demand and supply. Crude oil prices in the United States fell into negative territory for the first time in history attributable to falling demand, and rising inventory and storage reaching full capacities. Table 2 presents the selected major commodities prices as at 2 June 2020.

TABLE 2: SELECTED COMMODITIES PRICES AS AT 2 JUNE 2020

Energy	1 JUNE 2020		2 JUNE 2020	
	Price	Change	Price	Change
Crude oil	35.47	-0.02	36.1	0.66
Brent	38.13	0.29	39.14	0.82
Uranium	33.95	-0.15	33.7	-0.25
Metals	Price	Change	Price	Change
Gold	1733.23	4.13	1738.55	-3.85
Silver	18.17	0.32	18.22	-0.12
Platinum	833.21	-5.04	833.21	-5.04

Source: Trading economics – 2 June 2020

Oil and commodity prices are likely to remain depressed in the near term, which will push many commodity-dependent economies, especially those who are already burdened with high levels of external debt, closer to an economic crisis. Falling export revenues will also constrain their ability to commit adequate financial resources to fight the pandemic, scale up health preparedness, or extend income support to households most affected by the crisis and stimulate recovery. Most commodity-dependent economies would need to brace for a long, painful recovery, while avoiding a financial crisis (Rashid, Vergara, Afonso & Pitterle, 2020).

1.3 UNEMPLOYMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to large-scale job losses around the globe in the first two quarters of 2020. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) expects that over 6.7% of working hours (an equivalent of 195 million full-time workers) will be lost at the global scale in the second quarter of 2020 alone, which is worse than the job losses during the 2008–2009 crisis. Around 38% of the global workforce are employed in manufacturing, hospitality, tourism, trade and transportation and other service sectors that are facing a collapse in demand, a sharp fall in revenue and potential bankruptcies. With 90% of the world economy being under lockdown and unemployment rates are being projected to soar worldwide, it is estimated that 30 million jobs will be lost in larger countries such as the USA.

1.4 POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

The massive losses of employment and income due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will intensify global poverty, especially in developing countries where unemployment insurance and other forms of social protection are minimal or non-existent. According to baseline estimates, 34.3 million additional people including masses working in the informal sector, will fall below the extreme poverty line in 2020, with African countries accounting for 56% of this increase. The number of people living in extreme poverty could increase by nearly 130 million by 2030. Extreme poverty and hunger could be higher if developing countries experience a period of high inflation and low growth during recovery. The current crisis, especially if fiscal measures fail to protect income and stimulate consumption in the near term, will intensify income distribution patterns and inequality.

2 THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Africa accounts for only 2.4% of global confirmed cases, 1.2% of global reported COVID-19 related deaths, 2.3% of global total recoveries and 2.7% of global active cases, making it one of the least affected continents (see Table 3). Despite the limited outbreak, most countries in the region have introduced stringent lockdowns and social distancing measures.

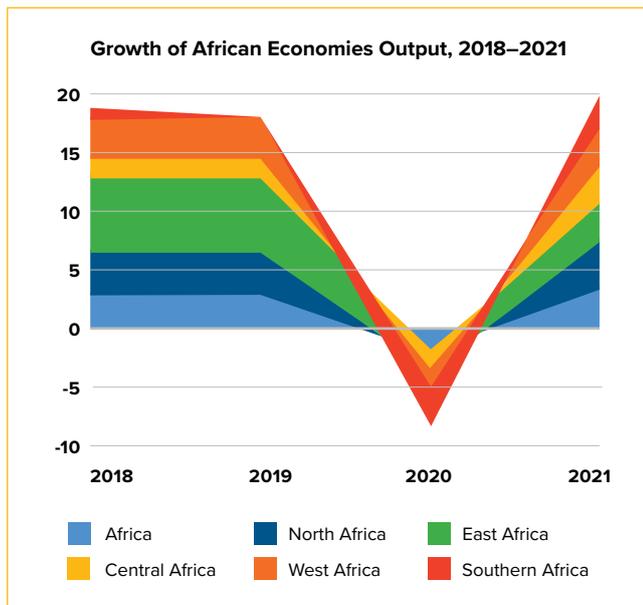
TABLE 3: TOTAL CASES, DEATHS, RECOVERIES AND ACTIVE CASES – AFRICA AND THE WORLD AS AT 2 JUNE 2020

	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Total Recoveries	Active Cases
World	6,384,205	377,797	2,920,953	3,085,455
Africa	155,038	4,369	65,959	84,710
%	2.4	1.2	2.3	2.7

Source: Adapted from World Health Organisation, 2020

Many countries in Africa, especially economies that are heavily dependent on commodity exports, are facing the impact of an economic crisis even though Africa is one of the least affected continents. Africa's GDP is projected to shrink by 1.6% in 2020, including economic downturns in Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa (and Namibia by extension). Many economies are experiencing a major contraction of the external demand and more adverse financing conditions. In addition, the collapse in tourism is projected to severely impact Cabo Verde, Egypt, Morocco, Sao Tome and Principe and South Africa (and Namibia by extension). High levels of public debt limited fiscal space, sharp declines in external flows, particularly export earnings, and low levels of reserves in several African economies, combined with political instability and weak security, make the region particularly vulnerable to a health and economic crisis. Given limited fiscal space, several economies are aggressively easing their monetary policies through interest rate cuts, and liquidity and credit measures to prevent crippling economic downturns. Figure 3 presents the growth of African economies output, 2018–2021.

FIGURE 3: GROWTH OF AFRICAN ECONOMIES OUTPUT, 2018–2021



Source: Adapted from UN-DESA, 2020

Figure 3 presents GDP growth of the regions in Africa. It shows that Southern Africa region is the worst affected where the GDP will shrink by 3.5% (greater than the shrink of Africa 1.6%) and that it will also recover at a slower pace of 2.7% which is lower than the average of 3.4% for Africa. It is worth noting that the East African region will still have a positive GDP growth despite the consequences of COVID-19. The economic contraction can be attributed to falling domestic demand, sharp declines in export revenues, remittances, foreign direct investment (FDI), and official development assistance (ODA), which accounted for more than a quarter of their GDP before the crisis. The great impact on the Southern Africa region is attributed to heavy dependence on import combined with falling domestic demand and sharp declines in export revenues unlike other regions which are dependent on local production and income from exports.

3 THE NAMIBIAN PERSPECTIVE

Namibia registered her first two confirmed cases of COVID-19 on 13 March 2020. As on 2 June 2020, Namibia has reported 25 total cases, 9 active cases, 16 recoveries, 0 deaths with over 4 000 tests completed. Namibia is currently on stage 3 of the lockdown phase from 2 - 28 June 2020. Table 5 shows the COVID-19 cases in Namibia as at 2 June 2020.

TABLE 4: TOTAL CASES, DEATHS, RECOVERIES AND ACTIVE CASES – AFRICA AND THE WORLD AS AT 2 JUNE 2020

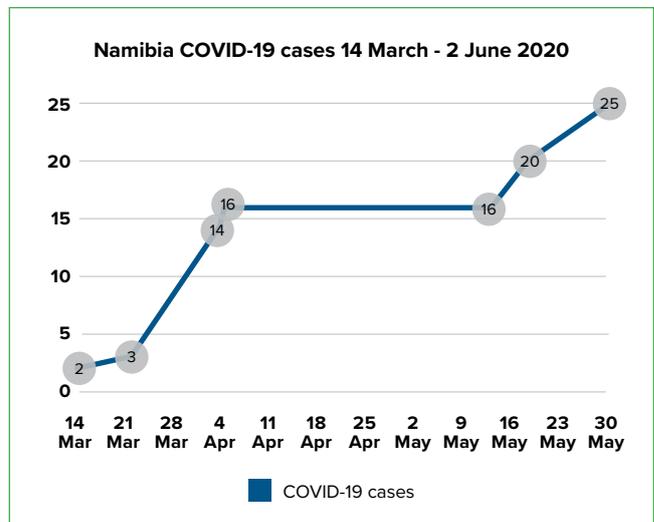
	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Total Recoveries	Active Cases	Total Tests
Namibia	25	-	16	9	4 005

Source: World Health Organisation, 2020

Figure 4 show that from the 4 April – 16 May 2020, Namibia saw a stagnation of new COVID-19 cases at 16 cases only. Namibia has been reporting new cases from the people that had been placed under

quarantine. All the new cases are imported cases from Namibians that returned home from the Republic of South Africa (RSA) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Namibia continues to repatriate citizens from different parts of the world and placing them under mandatory 14-day quarantine.

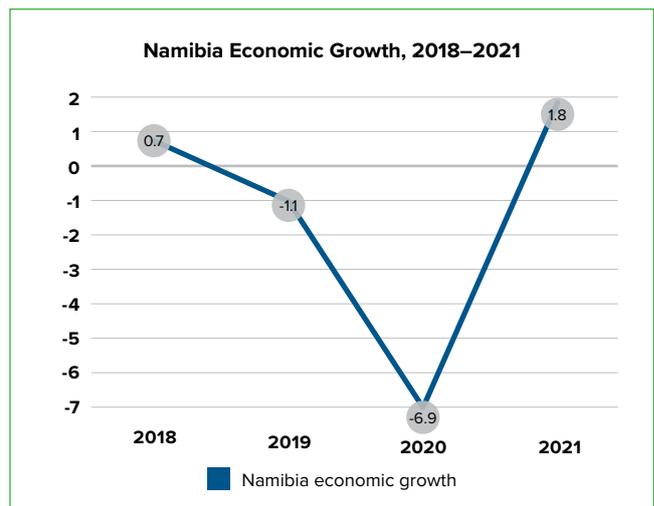
FIGURE 4: NAMIBIA COVID-19 CASES 14 MARCH - 2 JUNE 2020



Source: Adapted from World Health Organisation, 2020

The negative impact of COVID-19 has also substantially weakened the Namibian economic prospects and the Bank of Namibia (BoN) expects the real GDP to contract by 6.9% in 2020 before recovering to a growth of 1.8% in 2021. It is estimated that Namibia could lose between N\$5.1 billion and N\$7.5 billion in GDP due to COVID-19 outbreak. An estimated loss in private demand of N\$6 billion to N\$12 billion emanating from the lost business hours for non-essential retail shops, reduced demand due to loss of income and disrupted supply chains. Figure 5 presents the growth of Namibian Economy output, 2018–2021.

FIGURE 5: GROWTH OF NAMIBIAN ECONOMY OUTPUT, 2018–2021



Source: Adapted from Bank of Namibia, 2020

Figure 5 indicate that Namibia's GDP will shrink by 6.9% in 2020 and it is predicted that the economy will recover in 2021 at a rate of 1.8%. Figure 5 show that the Namibian economy has been on a negative

growth from 2019. The sharp decline in economic growth is however attributable to the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. According to Namibia Statistics Agency, the results of the survey on the effect of COVID-19 on selected businesses in Namibia indicate that 50% of businesses continued to trade partially, whereas 3.5% of businesses had permanently closed. 218 of the 226 businesses are adversely affected and the same businesses expect further adverse effects in the coming months. The major effect is reduced local demand, followed by reduced international demand. 204 of the responding businesses have lost revenue due to lockdown measures while 73 businesses lost turnover in the range of 91%-100%. The sectors most impacted by this range of revenue loss are Hotels and restaurants, Manufacturing, Construction, and Administrative and support services (NSA, 2020). These negative COVID-19 impacts will lead to a lower economic growth in 2020 through to 2021 given that the exact impact of COVID-19 is not yet determined and it is not known when a vaccine will be available.

According to the UN Namibia Economist and Development Coordination Officer (EDCO), the implications for Namibia are significantly tied to the main channels through which Namibia's economy is exposed to the COVID-19. There are three main channels through which countries are exposed to COVID-19 are: Commodities, Tourism and Trade. With the shrinking global economy, the demand for primary commodities (minerals in Namibia), is expected to decline. Countries in the sub region that trade significantly with the European Union (EU) and China, have been severely impacted by COVID-19, and there is also a lower demand in the EU and China, which causes lower demand for trade from Namibia. With 90 percent of the world's economy being locked down, there is a stagnation and negative numbers in the tourism receipts of countries that rely on tourism as a major source of revenue and foreign exchange earnings. The UN Namibia EDCO argues that besides the shrinkage in the world economy there is also the expectation of a decline and a contraction in world trade by 15% in 2020.

According to Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA), the top 5 export markets for Namibia in March 2020 were China, South Africa, Botswana, Canada and Spain. Together, these 5 countries accounted for 78% of the Namibian exports to the rest of the world. The top 5 import markets were South Africa, Zambia, Bulgaria, China and DRC, as they supplied the domestic economy with the most needed import requirements. Table 10 below presents the latest cases, deaths, recoveries and active cases of Namibia's top 5 trade partners (imports and exports).

TABLE 5: CASES, DEATHS, RECOVERIES AND ACTIVE CASES OF NAMIBIA'S TOP 5 TRADE PARTNERS

Trade Partner	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Total Recoveries	Active Cases
Spain	286,718	27,127	N/A	N/A
Canada	91,705	7,326	49,726	34,653
China	83,022	4,634	78,315	73
South Africa	34,357	705	17,291	16,361
DRC	3,569	24	1,521	2,024
Bulgaria	2,538	144	1,123	1,271
Zambia	1,089	7	912	170
Botswana	38	1	20	17
Namibia	25	-	16	9

Source: World Health Organisation, 2020

Table 6 show that the top 5 import and export trading partners of Namibia are also affected by COVID-19. With Spain, Canada, China and South Africa being the most affected, Namibia could face danger

of goods shortages given that approximately 80% of Namibian imports come from South Africa which is highly affected by COVID-19. It also means that Namibia will not be able to open the borders any time soon for trade if these trends continue.

The COVID-19 saw many countries closing down economic activities to curtail the widespread pandemic, Namibia was no exception as it joined the rest of the world in responding to the pandemic. Lockdowns and border closure will continue to pose a threat to the economy, especially for Namibia as it depended so much on imports. Related to that, the absence of economic activity is the heavy toll on jobs and incomes globally and in Namibia. With a shrinking world and local economy, there is a toll on jobs and incomes resulting from the effect of COVID-19 on sectors such as Transportation, Travel, Retail, Agriculture and Hospitality. These are some of the hardest hit sectors even in Namibia. Declining income and potential unemployment as a result of COVID-19 will lead to increased levels of poverty and inequality in Namibia. Table 7 presents reported cases of salary cuts and retrenchments in Namibia.

TABLE 6: REPORTED CASES OF SALARY CUTS AND RETRENCHMENTS IN NAMIBIA

Company	Actions Implemented
Skorpion Zinc Mine	Retrenched 1 500 employees
Safari Hotels	Retrenched 177 employees and 50% pay cut for 42 employees
International University of Management (IUM)	40% pay cut
Sun Karros Daan Viljoen Resort	Retrenched 20 employees
O&L	50% pay cut for all directors
Trustco Ltd	Potential retrenchment of 300 employees
Hansa hotel	Retrenching 30 out of 48 staff members.
The Namibian newspaper	To undergo restructuring and the new structure would mean there would be redundancies.
FP du Toit Transport	50% pay cut for all employees

Source: Various local media houses

It should be noted that Skorpion Zinc Mine had planned the retrenchments as the company had reached its life span but fast tracked the process due to COVID-19. There could be other cases of retrenchments and salary cuts that are not reported, thus the impact of COVID-19 should be much more than what is reported.

4 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SELECTED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN NAMIBIA

Namibia continues to record laudable milestones in terms of progress made on the implementation of several SDGs. However, there are also challenges impeding progress regarding the implementation and achievement of these goals. The global effects of the COVID-19

pandemic will add to these challenges and significantly slow down the rate of achievement of the SDGs globally and in Namibia. Below are the identified SDGs whose implementation are most affected by the COVID-19. With the global and local economies shrinking, people losing jobs and incomes declining, most of the citizens globally including Namibia are robbed of the ability to maintain normal living standard and a sustained quality of life as envisaged by SDGs and Namibia's Vision 2030. The preliminary assessments of the impact of COVID-19 in Namibia indicates that there will be an increase in unemployment resulting from retrenchments and closure of businesses.



Namibia records positive trends on early marriage, more women in parliament or managerial positions and the proportion of women making their own informed decisions regarding sexual relation, contraceptive use and reproductive health care. Namibia has also recorded positive trends on access to financial services through the number of banks and ATMs and the number of adults formally banking. The closure of the gender pay gap is also visible and promising. The preliminary assessment of the impact of COVID-19 indicate that Namibia's GDP will shrink by 6.9% in 2020 and recover in 2021 at a rate of 1.8%. Many businesses have been forced to cut operations and as a result, citizens are facing retrenchments and pay cuts. Namibia has recorded high cases of gender inequality whereby majority of the poor households are female headed ones. It is likely that this trend will continue.



Namibia has reached the status of an Upper Middle- Income Country (UMIC), which correlates with a significant reduction of poverty since independence. However, with economic stagnation, poverty is not declining further but has slightly increased for some groups. Despite the recent stagnation in poverty reduction, the proportion of people living in improvised houses and the food poverty rate declined moderately. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2008) Namibia ranks among the most unequal countries in the world. Unfortunately, progress toward reducing inequality in the country has been slow as the consumption Gini index remains very high (World Bank, 2020b). With jobs disappearing, incomes drying up and savings quickly whittled down, the question of food security lingers in the minds of Namibians in the face of the global Covid-19 as it imports 70% of its daily consumables from neighbouring South Africa. COVID-19 will result in an increase in poverty and the inequality gap will also widen in Namibia.



Positive trends can be seen for the enrolment in pre-primary education (country wide and in all regions) and the international support for scholarships. Despite a high portion of literate adults in the country the efforts to include the remaining part of the society do not show progress. Similarly, access to water, electricity and sanitation is not increasing sufficiently. The proportion of population that can use safely managed drinking water has increased. COVID-19 has forced schools and tertiary institutions to be closed and shift to online learning approach which might impact on quality of education, access and affordability due to the scarcity of resources. Persons living with physical and intellectual disabilities, have special needs which may not be catered for by the online learning approach and ultimately this will widen the inequality gaps in education. COVID-19 measures require clean water and high-end sanitary condition, the constant reliance of water and related need for optimum sanitation may not be sustainable, straining the already existing gaps. Fewer people will be able to afford clean water and sanitation in the face of job and income cuts. Namibia has started with a phased-in approach to return learners to school for face-to-face teaching (albeit, still under strict observations of prescribed lock-down measures). It is reported that 99% of the schools around the country are in top gear and ready for the return of the learners.



Namibia is on a promising track to end hunger. While the Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) had increased until 2010, it has been continuously declining since then. The annual consumption per capita derived from subsistence farming significantly increased between 2010 and 2016. Namibia is on track to improve the health status of its citizens. A continuous improvement is visible in HIV incidence, TB incidence, birth support, mortality rate from non-communicable diseases and the International Health Regulation Capacity (IHRC). Maternal Mortality Ratio, neonatal mortality, harmful alcohol consumption, suicide rate, vaccination coverage or the international support for the health sector show a positive trend. COVID-19 has had a major impact on food security in Namibia. More Namibians are expected to face food poverty stemming from disrupted supply chains, closed formal and informal business sectors and partial closure of schools that has hampered the school feeding program for school children. In addition, the disrupted supply chain also affected the imports of critical goods and services demanded by the response to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. For example, the Health Ministries have experienced stock-outs on medical supplies.



Positive trends are visible for the proportion of people living in improvised houses, the overall spending on natural heritage and affected people by natural disasters. Cumulatively, the lockdown

measures and isolation directives are prohibiting the sales of goods and services and in turn affect many cities and communities to sustain themselves both in rural and urban areas. The lockdown rules prevented the daily sales of small food items, gathering of more than 10 people and engagement in large events which disrupted daily income flows of the communities adding to their burden of increased poverty and hunger. The GRN relief packages was not received by some of these communities due to inaccessibility and dissemination of wrong information.



To cope with the consequences of COVID-19, there is need to solicit new and renew the ongoing partnerships by reviewing SDGs priorities and timelines in line with Agenda 2030. Where possible, extend program life cycles and introduce new programs specifically targeting the fight against COVID-19. Gains through the exchange rate and excess resources to be used in a flexible manner to assist when needs arises.

Life is slowing returning to normal as Namibians navigate the country's gradual reopening following the announce of Stage 3 of the lock-down measures and easing of trade restrictions which were necessitated to combat the spread of Covid-19. With the ban on the sale of alcohol lifted on Tuesday morning, Namibians rushed to retail outlets across the country to buy alcohol for their businesses and personal consumption. Some Namibians welcomes the move and are happy that they can continue selling alcohol to earn a living. "We have been suffering at home with no money to buy food, but with the reopening of bars, I really hope my small business will return to normal" said one businesswoman. On the positive side, reports also indicate that there has been a massive drop in crime rates with murders dropping by 23%, while attempted murders decreased by 32% and rapes by 82%. These statistics indicate that overall, crime dropped from 1 639 incidents to 1 369 incidents, a decrease of 16.5%.

5 CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 will clearly impact the SDG implementation globally including Namibia. The rapid spread of the pandemic and its growing death tolls and rising economic challenges have exposed the vulnerability of an increasingly inter-connected and inter-dependent world. It emphasises the imperative of stronger and more effective international cooperation to harness scientific expertise, technical know-how, disaster preparedness and most importantly financial resources to help people, most vulnerable communities and countries most affected by the crisis. Even though both new infections and COVID-19-related deaths have slowed down in recent weeks generally, there should still be caution about the future course of the pandemic and its economic and social consequences. The pace and sequence of recovery from the crisis will largely depend on the efficiency of public health and fiscal measures, containing the spread of the virus, minimising risks of re-infection, protecting jobs and income and restoring consumer and investor confidence.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) should to consider revisiting its priority list and place agriculture as a priority sector to boost local production that can solve the food security issue and reduce reliance on South Africa for consumable supplies.

The SDG-I Program should consider assessing the current projects life cycle and where necessary, extend and expand the project scope to include emerging needs arising as a result of COVID-19. Preferably, it would be important to consider renewing the ongoing partnerships and solicit new partnerships that can assist Namibia to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

SDG-I Program should also consider the use of gains from the exchange rate appreciation and excess resources from other projects in a flexible way that can assist the fight against to assist the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, it is recommended that the GRN and other development partners consider close monitoring of the impact of COVID-19 on the Namibian economy and on the selected SDGs' implementation, by compiling monthly reports/briefs on the new developments about COVID-19 and Governments' interventions locally and globally.

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