



About the author: *Fabakary Daffeh holds an Advanced MSc in Governance and Development from the University of Antwerp and a BA in Development Studies from The University of The Gambia (UTG). Currently, he is a faculty staff (Assistant lecturer) at UTG. He is broadly interested in Agro-*

ecology with a particular emphasis on food security, food sovereignty, and land research.

The COVID-19 pandemic -which arguably has its origin in Wuhan, Hubei Province in the People's Republic of China- continues not only to overwhelm healthcare services but also poses severe challenges to mundane and general life in the West African region. In this special issue of global politics and analysis of the pandemic, this brief provides a critical perspective on the unfolding socio-economic and political dynamics that have been taking place during the spread of the virus in West Africa.

With the accelerated surge of the pandemic across the globe, new imaginaries and framing have been unleashed from many skeptics as to why COVID-19 is disturbingly deadly in the West and much less deadly in Africa, especially in West Africa. Yet, the low fatality rate from COVID-19 in West Africa obscures much of the myriad of damage caused by the pandemic. Indeed, the dynamics of the virus are already a major threat to the general life of many in the region.

Another crucial dimension from the skeptics has been the population hesitancy about COVID-19 vaccines. Pre-vaccine preventive measures to curtail the spread of the virus and the launch of vaccination programs have not garnered much public adherence in the region. It's also necessary to mention that there is a lack of public trust and belief, as well as doubts about these vaccination programs.

Let me make one thing clear, it has not been my intention to argue that one end of the skeptic position is right and those downplaying their views are wrong. However, if a position beyond the skeptics is adopted, what is needed is to acknowledge and engage with local knowledge and 'decolonized' development in the region to avoid the worst impacts of the pandemic. This would require a better culture-science interface and also supporting cultural and economic sovereignty in the region to tackle West Africa's biggest enemy, ill-health and poverty, exacerbated now by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The spread of the virus and its socio-economic consequences have altered the economic and social

fabrics of many in the region, due to the loss of livelihood, income, and food security –with a potential risk of famine in two hotspots, namely northeast Nigeria and Burkina Faso- (FAO, 2020). A major dimension of precarity and dependency has been the urgent demand for financial support for pandemic response efforts, particularly foreign aid. However, these flows of foreign aid in the region offer mixed prospects to most of the citizens as efforts within the region have been stalled by corruption and have caused an incorrect priority of funds.

In the Gambia, a substantial share of COVID-19 funds for the pandemic response efforts have been lost to corruption. Nurses in the country have gone on a sit-down strike for the past week over non-payment of allowances and lack of protective equipment for the frontline healthcare workers. A report published by Malagen two weeks back, following an investigation into the utilization of COVID-19 funds allocated to the government, revealed serious corruption scandals. The report alleged that \$3.9million of the COVID-19 funds had been missing or stolen during the purchase of healthcare equipment and materials from Turkey by officials of the Ministry of Health.

From a political context, the spread of the virus seems to be forming a double edge sword in terms of economic security and public health governance. While many governments in the region are now worried about how to hack away from the choking creepers of the pandemic by strengthening their public health care systems in the region, the political landscape is becoming more unstable, characterized by unconstitutional change of governments through a resurgence of military coups. In under a year, four former French colonies: Niger, Chad, Mali, and recently Guinea have gone under a successful military takeover of the government that has resulted in turmoil. It becomes increasingly visible that the effects of the health crisis on relationships with former colonizers, in particular France, brings to the fore unanswered questions on instability in Francophone colonies in West Africa.

Reference

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation, (2020). UN food agencies warn of rising levels of acute hunger with potential risk of famine in four hotspots. Rome. Retrieved September 01, from <https://www.wfp.org/news/un-food-agencies-warn-rising-levels-acute-hunger-potential-risk-famine-four-hotspots>

Malagen Report, (2021). Health Ministry's \$3.9m deal: who got a cut for medical 'things bought for dying individuals'. Retrieved September 6, from https://malagen.gm/Coverstory/Coverstorydetails/Health-Ministry%E2%80%99s-39m-deal--who-got-a-cut-for-medical-%E2%80%98things-bought-for-dying-individuals%E2%80%99_41