

Post COVID-19 Recovery Plans should be Climate Proofed!

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The Corona Virus Disease – 19 (COVID-19) is a global pandemic, which has affected lives and economies worldwide. It has expanded into Africa, with the majority of countries, including Uganda, reporting increased confirmed cases. The rise in new infections is likely to continue exponentially, or even double as witnessed in some African countries. According to the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Uganda by 3rd June 2020, there are 489 reported cases, with 82 recovered and 0 death. This by large attributed to the national focus is on treatment of the victims and prevention of the spread of the virus. Since 18th March 2020, Uganda placed restrictions by issuing Presidential directives and the MoH guidelines, which resulted in temporary closure of education institutions, banned gatherings and travel; imposed a total lockdown and curfew while encouraging social distancing; regular washing of hands with soap and sanitizers; avoidance of touching in the nose, mouth and eyes.

Despite this, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on several social, culture and economic activities nationally and globally. Several business may not recovered due to the COVID-19 total and extended lockdown that has seen the population stay at home except for the essential services and sectors. Just like climate change impacts (*such as prolonged drought, floods, landslides and increased proliferation of pests & diseases for crops, livestock and human beings*), the COVID-19 impacts will not leave the operating environment and life the same as it was before and after easement of the total lockdown. The Government will continuously issue directives and guidelines to ensure public health and safety.

Climate change is the change in the average conditions — such as temperature and rainfall — in a region over a long period of time (NASA, 2020). It impacts all sectors, related community livelihoods and economic development nationally and globally. COVID-19 and climate change impacts are similar in certain aspects. Thus, both present challenges that impact on livelihoods and economy at local, national and global scales. They present public health and development issues and concerns threatening life, livelihood and economic development. Both advance vulnerabilities of their victims and yet they are not about to go in the near future. Therefore, we have to devise adaptation responses if they are to survive.

Despite this, the COVID-19 pandemic escalates climate change vulnerabilities. Hence, communities already affected by climate change impacts are more vulnerable to the COVID-19 impacts. It's much more difficult for community affected by floods and/or landslides across the country to adhere to COVID-19 issued directives and guidelines. Besides, even the Government's responsiveness to evacuate and support affected communities is slowed as greater focus is currently placed on COVID-19 and the related guidelines are restrictive in terms of movement. Interestingly, the same restrictions, directives and guidelines reduce the carbon foot print from various human activities thereby contributing to regulation of greenhouse gas emissions (i.e. carbondioxide, nitrous oxide), which influence future climate change impacts.

Climate action should learn from the COVID-19 response nationally and globally. Globally and in Uganda Government's responded urgently and suddenly through issuance of the directives and guidelines. In Uganda these were strongly enforced and have greatly contributed towards prevention of the spread of the virus in the community. Besides, even the population is very responsive in adhering to the presidential

directives and MoH guidelines. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the possibility of mobilizing local action and funding ahead of foreign funding for supporting implementation of Government responses to prevent further spread of the pandemic. Thus, to date about 28 billion Uganda shillings in-kind & cash (out of the targeted 170 billion) has been mobilized into the COVID-19 National Fund. In light of these lessons, the appeal to leaders (i.e. political, technical, religious & cultural) at all levels is that similar focus, commitment and approach should be deployed in the efforts for advancing investments in climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Moving forward, progressive easing of the total lockdown should not only focus on releasing of the sectors and institutions to get back to work, as if the operating environment has not changed. The Government will provide further directives and guidelines to follow by the populace to safe guard public health and contain further spread of the virus. However, it's important that all sectors and institutions urgently consider development and implement post COVID-19 recovery plans, strategies & budgets. However, these should be climate proofed as climate change and associated impacts are still with us and will certainly negatively affect the implementation of these plans. The guidelines for mainstreaming climate change in sector plans, programs and projects, recently developed by the Ministry of Water and Environment are a useful reference for achieving this.