

SOCIAL

AFRICA THIS WEEK



STAYING PUT HAS ITS OWN POSITIVE SPIN-OFFS

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IT IS clear we are going to have to find ways to phase out the lockdown before a cure for Covid-19 or a vaccine is found.

Just as we found a way to live with crime, while taking precautions, Covid-19 is not going to let us go back to living our lives as nonchalantly as we used to. There are too many of us for all the food parcels and donor-funding to carry us forever.

This virus was probably meant to teach us. As tragic as the deaths are, we are going to have to internalise the lessons and get going – we cannot hide forever. Instead, we are going to manage it vigilantly in all we do.

The lockdown helped us appreciate what we take for granted. For instance, not all of our commute is a must; we can live without most of the alcohol we consume; training at home is possible; most of the people we call VIPs do not render any essential service – in fact, we can live without them; and hygiene is fatally underrated.

How many people do you know who have flu this month, which is part of the so-called flu season? In my circles, not one soul. Why? Because reduced movement and the sanitisers at the entrance of every supermarket, inside every taxi and public toilet are working. Hygiene, or health education, was once an examinable school subject. We must reintroduce some of its concepts in our school curriculum.

About five years ago, a report by Initial Washroom Hygiene stated that 62% of men, and 40% of women, left a toilet without washing their hands. That was a disaster of pandemic proportions. It should have made global headlines. Listeriosis was another missed opportunity to reprioritise basic hygiene. The arrival of the coronavirus brought some urgency into ditching these bad habit. Long may our newly acquired habits – washing hands, minimising movement, drinking or smoking less, spending time with family – continue!

Africa is learning to cope. South Africa has been in lockdown for more than 40 days. Botswana is talking about reopening after its five-week lockdown. Nigeria is focusing on restricting interstate movement, a more practical approach.

Madagascar is exporting its artemisinin-based cocktail to countries like Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea; possibly Mozambique and Senegal. Even the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the AU are talking to President Andry Rajoelina about his herbal tonic, Covid-Organics. Who knows what to make of Minister Zweli Mkize's tweet on Tuesday about receiving "a call from the government of Madagascar, who asked for help with scientific research"? For compelling evidence, he might as well talk to all South Africans who have used *lengana*, *umhlonyane* or *wilde als*.

It is impressive that companies like HP and the AU Commission agreed to expand digital learning opportunities. This will not help immediately, but will take us closer to inclusive digitisation of Africa. Some airlines will probably perish or radically shore up their efficiency game, which is great. We will probably value domestic tourism more when the lockdown ends.

All these are positive take-outs from the crisis we are in.

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INDUSTRY

“LOCKDOWN” and “physical distancing” have slipped relatively easily into our daily language as we grapple with our new Covid-19 reality.

Harder to absorb are the effects on every sector of society.

The economy is forecast to contract by more than 6%, against a global contraction of 3%. And the aftermath will probably linger for decades to come.

Many sectors have begun putting recovery plans in place, structured around new physical distancing rules and online and digital innovations. But the tourism sector remains stranded in lockdown purgatory.

The UN World Tourism Organization says tourism will be the worst-affected of all major economic sectors.

Global tourism revenue was forecast to grow by 4% this year; now it is forecast to drop by 35%, accompanied by global job losses of over 75 million.

In previous pandemics, it has taken tourism an average of 19 months to recover, but such is the scale and impact of Covid-19 that recovery will take a good deal longer.

The economic contraction will erode business and personal wealth, leaving less for business and recreational tourism. Physical distancing requirements will increase the cost burden on businesses while reinforcing fears of infection across society, further slowing the tourism recovery.

In South Africa, tourism had been touted as a “sunrise sector” and the “new gold” of the economy. It contributed 9% of all economic activity and more than 1.5 million jobs in 2018.

The sector is diverse, anchored by large, well-established hotel groups and travel companies that complement a network of micro and small enterprises, including B&Bs, tour guides and caterers.

The lockdown has affected the entire sector and there is little clarity on when or how it will start operating again.

Social media is crowded with pleas for help from the sector as owner-run businesses face ruin, having to make staff redundant and losing assets they have invested their life savings in.

The hard reality is that more than 40% of tourism spend comes from international travellers who are unlikely to be allowed back into South Africa until next year. It leaves little hope for many of these businesses.

Our efforts to protect and restore the cultural and natural assets that underwrite our tourism offering will experience a roll-on impact. This is particularly true for our natural landscapes and systems, where state agencies and private conservation businesses rely heavily on tourism income to fund operations.

Perhaps more importantly, the tourism operations associated with the landscapes underwrite local economies, as demonstrated by the cluster of tourism activities around the Kruger, iSimangaliso, uKhahlamba, Addo and others. It's much the same throughout

OPINION

South Africa's us-and-them lockdown is not working at all

IF A GOVERNMENT can't see or hear most of the people it governs, they are unlikely to work with it.

It is common to point out that the current Covid-19 lockdown shows there are two South Africans: one in which people are well-equipped to obey the rules and one in which they are not. The government knows this. President Cyril Ramaphosa has said as much recently and announced a set of grants to help people living in poverty to cope. So why has the lockdown seemed to ignore this?

Why did the same government send thousands of troops on to the streets the day after it announced the grants, signalling that it believes people living in poverty must be forced to obey?

The answer is not that the government hates the impoverished or could not care less about them. It is that those in politics and government have no idea how most people in this country live.

Despite 26 years of democracy, South Africa is still divided between insiders and outsiders. Insiders get a pay cheque, outsiders don't. Insiders tend to live in suburbs, outsiders in shack settlements or townships. But more divides them than this. The



VILAKAZI Street in Soweto is reduced to a ghost town amid the Covid-19 lockdown. Without a vibrant and responsible tourism economy, there is simply not enough funding to support the livelihood of the communities who live close to regular tourist attractions. | TIMOTHY BERNARD African News Agency (ANA)

Tourism takes a pounding in lockdown purgatory

As the industry languishes, the communities it supports are feeling the pain. Vital funding for conservation has vanished too, write Dr Andrew Venter and Roving Reporters



Africa, with tourism clusters associated with the Okavango, Serengeti, Virunga and Simien Mountain landscapes, to name but a few iconic destinations among hundreds.

In 2018, nature tourism contributed more than \$120 billion globally to the protection and restoration of the critical natural systems and the local economies they support. This income has now largely dried up. Philanthropists contribute a further \$50bn to the same cause, but this too will be heavily eroded as the clamour for Covid-19 relief grows.

This loss of revenue comes at a bad time for nature, with three-quarters of our planet's land and two-thirds

of its oceans significantly altered by unsustainable human activity.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services, we have lost 50% of the world's forests and coral reefs and 70% of wetlands; we have dammed two-thirds of the world's main rivers, and wildlife populations have declined by 60% since 1970.

Our health and well-being are threatened as a result, as food production is affected and fresh water becomes scarcer. The decline of our natural systems will make it harder to reverse global warming as we rely on natural systems to absorb massive amounts of greenhouse gases.

The global network of protected landscapes and oceans is a system of nature banks. These protect essential systems and the biodiversity that constitutes life on the planet.

Without a vibrant and responsible tourism economy, there is simply not enough funding to support the protection and restoration of these natural systems and the livelihood of the communities who live close to them.

Governments have grown complacent about their custodianship of this essential service. They have come to rely on tourism revenue to make up the shortfall in their spending. Hopefully, the loss of tourism revenue will serve as a wake-up call.

To be sure, tourism is not without its faults. At many tourism hot spots, it has done harm to the environment, caused pollution, destroyed ecosystems and damaged or warped social fabric. However, its role in helping to underwrite nature's protection and restoration is significant.

The sector needs to be embraced, enabled and prioritised. We need to do more to develop partnerships that will protect and restore nature while developing vibrant and sustainable local economies. Our common good and future demand it.

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ment feared the virus would be spread by suburbanites clogging up parks, sipping cocktails or ordering sushi. More likely is that it worried that, if people in townships and shack settlements were given the slightest leeway, they would abuse it and ruin the lockdown.

It knows control is not enough, hence the grants increase, shelters for homeless people, food parcels and water tankers. But the support is deeply patronising, insiders deciding what outsiders need.

RISING INFECTION CURVE

The results have been all too visible. Instead of reaching out to people in townships and shack settlements to work with it, army troops and the police are sent to impose the lockdown by force.

This is not working. The homeless don't want to live in their shelters and many are back on the streets. In many areas where outsiders live, life has carried on as before.

So far, this reality does not seem to have had much impact on the infection figures – they have risen as testing has spread, but there is still no huge increase in cases.

More important, there is no sharp spike in the death toll. But these are early days: as the disease spreads, the limited reach of insider politics among the outsider majority could still cause great harm.

So, insiders' failure to govern most of the country is threatening the growth in infections it was meant to delay. What can be done?

WORKING TOGETHER

Obviously, the government must work with outsiders to fight the disease. That means talking to and listening to them. But not all organisations that claim to speak for outsiders really do, and the government cannot know which do as long as it does not know the places where outsiders live. In the longer term, it needs to change that. But it will not do it instantly.

Grants may help outsiders cope. Measures that are more sensitive to outsiders' worlds – such as ensuring hand-washing and social distancing at places where people gather, rather than banning the gatherings – may make success more likely.

But unless outsiders work with the government, protection against the virus will remain limited. So, despite the risks of strengthening those who want to use people, not speak for them, the government has little option but to engage with all the groups it can find, including some that have been bullied and harassed by the local authorities. It will need judgement and political skill to work out who is really interested in protecting people's health and who is not.

There are risks but, if it continues to control outsiders instead of listening to them, it may find that its efforts to fight the virus do little but create new sources of pain.

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STEVEN FRIEDMAN

realities outsiders experience mean that their lives follow very different patterns to those of the insiders.

Politics and government are largely blind to this because they are an insider game. Outsiders vote, but insiders decide what is important.

This is partly a product of social and economic divides, but also of “Struggle” politics before 1994. Democratic politics was difficult: despite romantic myths about mass politics under apartheid, the links between activists and the people were often weak. When an activist said they had consulted “the people”, they meant the layer of activists below them.

Inevitably, this shaped how the country was governed after 1994. A year after democracy was achieved, newly elected politicians knew so little about the people who had voted for them that they asked researchers to find out why township residents were not paying for services. The trend has continued – repeatedly, government development plans have been frustrated by a failure to know how the people they were meant to benefit

were living.

The lockdown has underlined this.

OUTSIDERS ARE DIFFERENT

The government was determined to consult “stakeholders” to win support for sacrifice. But who was consulted? We know business and political parties were. Trade unions may have been. Their members are not nearly as well-off as many other insiders, but they get wages or salaries and so belong to the insider club. But no one with roots in townships and shack settlements was included. Religious leaders were consulted, but only to seek agreement that they would not hold services.

This partly explains how the lockdown has been enforced.

The rules seem to make no concessions to the fact that people in shacks and matchbox houses live different lives to those in suburban homes, that people who get by on informal work face different problems to workers.

South Africa's lockdown may be the strictest in the world. During Level 5 people could not take a daily walk or buy alcohol (a ban which is still in place) as those experiencing lockdowns in other countries can. Even food deliveries were outlawed. This was surely not because the govern-