

In all modesty and honesty, this is a pivotal editorial, because it is the first to appear in the new post-covid-19 outbreak era, and the last one that will be written by me. After more than thirty years of volunteering for Afrika Focus, I thought it was time to pass on the baton to a new and, let's be frank, younger team. I wish them all the best, and given their age... another 30 years at least. Also, our editorial secretary Dominique Godfroid has retired since April 1st. Over the last 20 years she has been the driving force behind our journal so we really want to thank her wholeheartedly and wish her good luck!

Like so many people I really hate the irrational mess created by the coronavirus, but I do think it is still necessary to discuss it in some way as it has been massively disruptive. This is presumably the first time the whole of humanity has been hit by just one causal factor. The size of the virus is inversely proportional to the havoc it has created. Global society has been shaken to its foundations in terms of its socio-economic, psychological, cultural, wellbeing. Supposedly strong leaders, such as Putin, Trump and Bolsonaro, have been shown to lack substance and vision (which indeed are words that we wouldn't have associated with them even before, but now at least it is clear to most if not all...). Only a handful of politicians have shown they have the stamina to lead, not only by example, but also through true statesmanship. At a time in which big problems call for visionary solutions, few have actually been proposed. That attitude of 'it's all about the economy', continues to take top billing with politicians, world leaders and their organisations limited by their tunnel-vision. Time will tell how all this will evolve.

In the midst of all this, Africa seems to have escaped the worst. Reported death tolls in African countries are lower than elsewhere. And this is very positive news, of course. However, these low figures hide a hard reality. Through the protective measures (lock-down, ban on movements, etc.) and the disruption of the world economy, lots of countries have been unable to continue their 'normal' food production activities. Land has been left idle, and remains unprepared. Fields have not been planted. Improved seeds and fertilizers have not reached remote-area (and other) producers. And, worse of all, the unprecedented Desert Locust threat to food security and livelihoods continues in the Horn of Africa, a scourge that has continued through the coronavirus pandemic, and is likely to spread to southwest Asia and perhaps West Africa. As we type this text, in Sudan, the seasonal rains commenced end of May/beginning of June in the extreme south of the summer breeding area just north of South Sudan. If rains continue in the coming weeks, then conditions are likely to be favourable for any swarms that arrive from Ethiopia and Kenya and they would be more likely to settle, mature and lay eggs. If, on

the other hand, rains are limited and conditions remain dry during June in Sudan, then swarms would continue to eastern Chad in the last week of June and migrate further west into the Sahel of West Africa ahead of the summer rains, reaching eastern Niger during the first week of July, eastern Mali in mid-July, and southeast Mauritania in late July. (see: <http://www.fao.org/ag/locusts/en/info/info/index.html>).

Older readers may recall locust ‘plagues’ as something from the recent past. In the 1970s and 1980s there were several years where Africa was seriously hit, but then an international network was set up, monitoring new outbreaks and killing budding swarms. After a few years, the international community, but even worse, African leaders, ‘forgot’ about the problem, and a once effective early-warning system fell to pieces. Where other countries were clearly not prepared for the covid-19 alert, most of the African continent was not ready to meet the locust scare. Here also time will tell how this will develop, but several sources have calculated that the number of chronically hungry people will increase by 200 million to 250 million, which will bring the world-hungry population to above one billion!

Against this – frightening – backdrop we have prepared another issue of Afrika Focus. It presents different topics in different thematics and fields of scientific research. I would say: enjoy! But also, do not forget about the health and food insecurity issues that continue to threaten the continent...

Patrick Van Damme
Editor-in-chief