

**PUBLISHED BY:**

**Global Emerging Pathogens  
Treatment Consortium**

**JOURNAL WEBSITE**

[www.getjournal.org](http://www.getjournal.org)

Date Received: January 9, 2023  
Date Reviewed: February 26, 2023  
Date Accepted: March 3, 2023

# From HIV/AIDS through Ebola to COVID-19: The Unlearned Lessons from Epidemics in Africa: A Personal Perspective

Tangwa GB, PhD, FCAS, FAAS

Cameroon Bioethics Initiative (CAMBIN)/University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0062-8106

## ABSTRACT

Within the four decades spanning the 1980s to the year 2020 and counting, the continent of Africa has witnessed many deadly epidemics, notable among which are HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and COVID-19. For anyone in Africa who has lived through these epidemics and critically observed their impacts on the continent, it is evidently clear that the lessons that should be learned from them have not yet been fully learned. These unlearned lessons are related without being limited to the political, economic, healthcare, and ethical domains. The events accompanying COVID-19, globally and on the African continent, have underscored these lessons that must be learned, or else the continent has no future except as an entity of colonial and global exploitation. In this article, I propose to highlight and briefly discuss some of these lessons that should be learned, failing which we, Africans, need to be studied as a strange species of human beings, completely devoid of rational self-interest, inhabiting the most endowed continent on planet Earth, without being aware of it.

**Keywords:** Africa; Epidemics; Colonialism; Exploitation.

## INTRODUCTION

The Global Emerging Pathogens Treatment Consortium (GET) was created in August 2014 at the height of the West African Ebola Epidemic (2013-2016). It was an attempt by indigenous African experts from several relevant specializations, in collaboration with interested foreign counterparts, to mount a holistic response to an emerging infectious disease (EID). They drew lessons from past epidemics where they had watched global foreign experts, foreign capital, and foreign interests take complete charge and command of the situation in their own interest and that of their own homes and locality [1]. A part of the work of the GET Consortium is captured in the

following publication: *Socio-cultural Dimensions of Emerging Infectious Diseases in Africa: An Indigenous Response to Deadly Epidemics* [2].

## New Existential Paradigm

To be effective, a locally grounded indigenous outfit against EIDs and Bio-insecurity in the African context must be accompanied by the adoption of a strong new existential paradigm involving mental decolonization, self-reliance, rejection of all forms of colonial hegemony and unjustified dependency. Only in this way can it hope to replace the current dominant paradigm based on colonial heritage, predatory exploitation, hegemony, and the attempt to impose a global

mono-culture through scientific myths and pretentious philanthropy.

There is an urgent need for decolonizing our minds [3, 4] and even the concepts and terms that we are habituated to use unthinkingly or uncritically. We must abandon terms and concepts imposed without justification from our own point of view and perspective by colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the colonial legacy. These terms and concepts have had a long evolution and, basically, consider and look at Africa and Africans as a colonial asset and an economic resource to be guiltlessly wantonly exploited. Usage of such terms and expressions anchors us firmly within a paradigm from which we must radically break to be able to make any meaningful progress as an autonomous people and as a continent side by side with all others in the world. Many Africans unconsciously use and apply these concepts and terms without awareness of their historical evolution necessitated by the shifting political correctness of the different succeeding historical epochs.

#### **Examples of Externally Coined Nomenclatures**

Here are some examples of some of the terms and concepts in question, coined and imposed by colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the colonial legacy, beginning from the current and contemporary and going backwards in the history of their evolution: Emerging countries/Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) \ Least Developed Countries (LDCs)/Low-income countries (LICs) \ low resourced settings \ poor resource countries \ countries with limited resources \ developing countries \ underdeveloped countries \ undeveloped countries \ backward peoples \ uncivilized peoples \ uncultured peoples \ barbarians \ savages.

While some of us may hesitate to describe our own particular country as "a heavily indebted poor country", many of us are quite happy describing it as an "emerging country", forgetting that both descriptions are the coinage of external stakeholders imposed at different times to achieve their own aims and purposes. All these colonial/neocolonial terms and concepts seek to throw a single blanket over very diverse peoples and countries for the convenience of their external colonizers and exploiters. There is nothing wrong with accurately descriptive terms like north Africa, south Africa, east Africa, west Africa, Africa north/south of the Sahara, etc., if these are used purely descriptively, but every part and every country of Africa is diverse and significantly different in many respects from the others. The communalities of Africans are in the historical, socio-cultural, and metaphysico-religious domains,

in shared ideas, beliefs, experiences and practices. But every African country or region ought to be called by its proper name as well as appreciated with all its specificities and not blanketed with others for the convenience of external stakeholders, let alone colonizers and exploiters.

#### **The Environment, Biodiversity, and Artificiality**

Biodiversity is a very important human and environmental value, and some of the emerging health risks the world is facing are directly related to the destruction of biodiversity and climatic systems through the increasing discovery, introduction, and use of artificial systems /devices, mono-cultures, highly profitable for their inventors but of dubious value for the long-term safety and security of human beings and the other creatures with which we share our planet.

The question about the origin of the COVID-19 virus has been lazily addressed by scientists and swept under the carpets in the interest of marketing experimental vaccines, but it is plausible to hypothesize that the virus originated from a laboratory rather than from the environment and is artificial rather than natural in its composition. If it is plausible to think, on the basis of traditional medicine in all parts of the world, that every dangerous virus that springs out of nature itself has an effective antidote in nature, the COVID-19 virus, given its resistance to existing treatments and experimental vaccines and its tendency to mutate into different new forms indefinitely, is likely of artificial rather than natural origin.

All recent deadly infectious epidemics, whether of natural or artificial origin, have been present on the African continent but so far failed to wipe out its whole population in the way that prior informed 'objective' calculations would indicate, given general poverty, dangerous habits/practices, ignorance, unawareness, and lack of modern medical facilities [4]. The resilience of African populations against epidemics and pandemics is likely due to **their** biodiversity, nutritional varieties, and living relatively close to nature, far from artificiality.

#### **Greatest Unlearned Lesson**

Perhaps, the greatest unlearned lesson is that the pandemics we have experienced in recent times and maybe expecting in the future are likely the resultant consequence of the artificial global culture (an aspect of the exo-somatic evolution), epitomized in artificial intelligence and machine learning/teaching, the continuous banishment of nature by technology, that the world has witnessed increasingly since the Western Industrial Revolution. Much of the African continent is relatively still close to nature and undestroyed by technologies, and this should at least be

maintained. Moreover, in the industrialized Western world, Exo-somatic evolution and artificiality have clearly reached their logical limits and insisting on pushing them any further will likely push human life over an evolutionary precipice. Reversing this trend is more important than the current obsession with manufacturing vaccines, mass vaccinating the global populations, let alone assuring equitable access to vaccines for any of our epidemics or pandemics. There is a need for a counter-revolution to the exaggerated industrial and technological revolutions that should start in Africa!

### **CONCLUSION**

As a continent, Africa has remarkable biodiversity on account of which or in spite of which it has borne the heaviest burdens of the deadly epidemics and pandemics of the past several decades under the controlling guidance of foreign interests, both philanthropic and exploitative. The unlearned lessons that must be learned from this situation have to do with genuinely decolonizing the continent and freeing it from its colonial legacy/hegemony to assume its destiny in a self-reliant and autonomous manner. In accomplishing this task, human, non-human animal, and plant biodiversity, naturalness, and techno-cautiousness shall be some of the most important assets. The GET Consortium seems in a very good position to

contribute to the revolution with its ONE HEALTH policy that conceives of health, biosafety and biosecurity in holistic terms, beginning from the environment through plants and animals to human beings.

### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Abayomi A, Makinde D. How and why the global emerging pathogens treatment consortium was created. Tangwa GB, Abayomi A, Ujewe SJ, Munung NS, editors. In: *Socio-cultural Dimensions of Emerging Infectious Diseases in Africa: An Indigenous Response to Deadly Epidemics*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. 2019; 15-29
- [2] Tangwa GB, Abayomi A, Ujewe SJ, Munung NS [Eds.]. *Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Emerging Infectious Diseases in Africa: An Indigenous Response to Deadly Epidemics*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. 2019
- [3] Thiong'o N. *Decolonising the mind: the politics of language in African*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers. 1992
- [4] Wiredu K. *Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion*. *Afri. Stud. Q.* 1998; 4(1):17-46
- [5] Tangwa GB, Munung, NS. COVID-19: Africa's Relation with Epidemics and Some Imperative Ethics Considerations of the Moment. *Res Ethics*. 2020;16(3-4): 1-11.