



FORUM

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

A world-famous economist, University Professor and Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, Jeffrey Sachs has always focused on economics and sustainable development, with special attention to the topic of global health. We spoke with him about the current pandemic, including its impact on sub-Saharan Africa.

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Jeffrey Sachs, Columbia University professor and United Nations advisor, is an economist who explores the delicate equilibrium between economic development and sustainability, ever mindful of the profound differences between the global North and South and the multitude of interconnections among societies, people and disciplines. Here, eschewing the false dichotomy between health and the economy, he gives CUAMM his reading of the current public health emergency.

- o **From the beginning of the pandemic, a dichotomy has often been drawn between health and the economy, with some insisting upon the need to prioritize safeguarding public health even at the expense of economic circuits, and others who maintain that lockdowns hurt people even more in economic terms than health-wise. Is it possible to strike a balance between the two?**

There is no tradeoff. To save the economy it is necessary to end the epidemic. A shutdown might be useful for a few weeks to lower the number of cases, but the real way to stop the epidemic in the longer term is through public health measures. These include wearing face masks, keeping physical distance, stopping large gatherings, protecting group living (care centers, prisons, hostels), promoting safe working conditions, and the testing, isolating and tracing of infectious cases. The latter approach aims to isolate all infectious individuals so that they do not infect other people; it is accomplished by watching for symptoms, contacting people who have been in close contact with known infected cases, and isolating those who test positive or who are suspected of being infected. By combining all of these public health measures, it is possible to open up the

economy to a significant extent without reigniting a massive epidemic.

- o **The number of Covid-19 infections in Africa has been relatively limited thus far. However, the measures being adopted there seem to take little account of societal differences: in the sub-Saharan countries where CUAMM is active, many are dependent on subsistence economies, which makes lockdowns impracticable. What role should international organizations and NGOs like ours play in settings like this?**

The key role of international organizations and NGOs should be to support the rapid scaling-up of the public health measures listed above. We need to help every African country and every community to contain the virus through community health workers, testing and tracing, free distribution of face masks and sanitizers, online applications, safe workplace practices, and other related means. NGOs can also offer social support to households and communities hard hit by the loss of incomes (for example, a loss of jobs or a decline in remittance flows).

- o **Which model of sustainable development can be envisaged ensuring that developing countries can benefit?**

The core principle of the Sustainable Development Goals, and of fighting the epidemic, should be "Leave no one behind." It is easy to forget, or even to endanger, the poor, the elderly, the indigenous, the minority, or other vulnerable groups. We must look after everybody in the fight against the virus, and in the achievement of sustainable development.