



A Lifeless Help for the South Africans in Crisis

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Key messages

- There is a need to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on poverty and income related health problems at the households' level in South Africa.
- The understanding of how the South Africa's Social Security Grants (SASSG) interventions helped in cushioning the negative impact of these crisis is pertinent.
- The alignment of policies across the economy in order to reduce the complexity of poverty, income and health is imperative for timely policy interventions in order to achieve the – no poverty (SDG 1), good health and wellbeing (SDG 3) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10) targets in South Africa.

What's the issue?

COVID-19 has highlighted the critical role of adequate investments in the public health systems and comprehensive social protection programmes. Many South Africans suffer from a poor quality of life. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the crisis, increased by the weak and poorly implemented social protection programs offered by the government. Hence, the central contention here was that poor health and income is disproportionately borne by the poor in South Africa and that such income-related health inequalities appear to have become substantially more pronounced in the COVID-19 era relative to the pre-COVID-19 period. Despite the existence of the hypothesis of inverse relationship between the injection of the South Africa Social Security Grant (SASSG) on poverty status and income-related health inequality in some instances, we dwelled on the positive relationship between these variables. Therefore, we hypothesized that the economic dislocation caused by the COVID-19 disproportionately affects the South African poor.

Why is this important?

In South Africa, the persistence of crisis has its roots in colonialism and apartheid, whose legacies persist even till today. These colonial rule and apartheid policies had been so comprehensive that they affected all aspects of social, economic, and political life in the country. The outbreak of COVID-19 further aggravated these problems and exerted a more drastic poverty burden on the poor with income and health inequality. To confront these challenges, bold actions are needed to address the challenges in a dynamic-holistic manner so that South Africa can meet with the - no poverty (SDG 1), good health and wellbeing (SDG 3) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10) targets by the end of this century. One way that this can be done is to address the deep income and health inequalities in the nation. Hence, the short term policy options injected to mitigate the effect of poverty, income and health inequalities include the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant that form part of South Africa's basket of social assistance programmes. We reinforced the fact that high income inequality has a far-reaching consequence for health and poverty. It is therefore imperative that unless governments take concerted action to further implement a more comprehensive reforms, that is capable of ushering in universal economic and health coverage, the COVID-19 impacts, inequality and health issues will linger in South Africa and with the poor bearing the brunt.

What should policy makers do?

- a) COVID-19 impacts the South African households by deepening their poverty status than the pre- COVID-19 period.
- b) Social protection (SASSG) is critical for cushioning the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic induced poverty and income related inequalities in South Africa.
- c) Poverty and health policies that are sound on paper needs to align across the economy, in order to reduce the complexity of poverty and health in such a dynamic and holistic manner, so as to accommodate future pandemic(s).
- d) Need to initiate call(s) for collaboration between government, researchers and stakeholders working in the relevant sectors.

Policy recommendations

- e) Government and relevant stake holders should put in place strategies to rectify the gap in the delivery of the social protection grants by learning from its impact, by improving on the payment system and ensure that all the payments are made in a timely manner in order to help the poor.
- f) The government, donor agents and other stake holders should carry out a more effective poverty and inequality reduction in South Africa, a pro-growth poverty reduction strategy, where interventions specifically targets poverty reduction, hence, contribute to economic recovery in South Africa.
- g) Support from the government and other stakeholders, towards conducting empirical analysis across a wider variety of national policy and economic contexts in the region may further clarify the relationships among the concerned SDG targets and policy lessons they imply.

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