



# Ask not what you can do to Corona, but what Corona can do to you!

**N**o matter the angle of the spotlight, Coronavirus is positioned in the front and centre. Its message is loud and clear, the human race will be used as vehicles to occupy the globe. Corona seeks to thrive and it is impatient and aggressive. It is discriminatory. It wipes out the elderly effortlessly yet hardly causes great harm to infants. It is restless, jumping and moving from one to another...surface...person...air? Pretty much like the human race? We achieve, occupy, produce, consume, consume some more, conquer and move on. In the process, the ecosystem becomes a casualty.

The 4th Industrial revolution is hailed and revered, artificial intelligence is enticing, information on practically anything is shared and reshared in split seconds...in all this time, we have failed to be still and think. It is only when we pause, still the mind and ask: "What can I do for you Coronavirus?" that we may actually be able to think for ourselves and our ecosystems, without the background noise of the mainstream and social media.

I pause and I reflect...

When the Presidents of countries attempt to deal with Coronavirus by locking us down, how is that supposed to yield success when countries are fragmented? The gap between privilege and poverty is larger than oceans that separate continents. Do we pick hunger to kill us or Coronavirus to kill us?

### Which choice would a poor person make?

As a poor person, I would pick Coronavirus for three reasons: it is invisible, it attacks quickly and my last days will be spent in the luxury of accommodation



**"As a poor person, I would pick Coronavirus for three reasons: it is invisible, it attacks quickly and my last days will be spent in the luxury of accommodation that has been prepared by government."**

that has been prepared by government. If I recover, I may be in a position to negotiate for a better life for my family prior to discharge. My life is a gamble anyway, every day! Therefore I will refuse to stay indoors because my wealth and my world, also known as: my family, depends on me.

Prior to democracy, our movement was physically restricted, post-democracy our movement continues to be restricted, mainly because there is no money. Access to everything is a right but economically I am unable to afford that right. Yes, Coronavirus can kill me and my family, even wipe



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out my community, but does government care about the poverty that my family and community are subjected to, or do they care only about how they may look to the rest of Africa and the world for killing so many of "their own". You see, poverty is a disaster but it is not contagious to the middle class, so it is not a priority.

But we the poor are seemingly equal in the eyes of Coronavirus. The middle class and us have the same power of spreading infection if we carry Coronavirus.

So Coronavirus has come with power for all and the delivery of basic rights for the poor. It is because of Coronavirus that all the ministers in government are actually leading from the front. They are accounting to the country after a very long time. The homeless are being treated as human beings by being provided with shelter although very basic, water has reached communities that have never had that basic need met before, food is being delivered to social grant recipients, and humanitarian organisations and individuals have opened up their purses, grocery cupboards and shared their children's toys and games, so that we should stay indoors.

For the middle class, Coronavirus has created discomfort, confining them to their underpopulated mansions, having to operate their own lawnmowers, vacuum cleaners and stoves and more especially having to care for their own children without nannies. The restriction on movement is also felt since visiting bars, restaurants and personal grooming parlours is restricted. However, the internet is available at all hours for trading and business to continue.

With all this said, how will government sustain their efforts to poor people when Corona retreats? We will go back to our piece jobs and the boss will pay less because he lost money during the lockdown. The shops will increase prices, because they lost business during the lockdown. My children will need computers to learn at home because schools and universities are moving classes online. If I can't afford these, then they will just end up like me, not being able to complete school, or maybe an extra year in school. Will they be rid of poverty as adults? I worry for their futures. Maybe my boss will

employ my son for piece jobs on the weekends so he can buy a computer?

In the meantime, the middle class is already accessing online platforms for their children to keep ahead of the school and university programmes. Clearly, to salvage 2020 would mean that the wheels have to keep turning. So teachers and lecturers will fall into technocratic traps and follow the mandates of moving teaching online without researching the African strengths that could be tapped into so as to engage in other methods and modes of teaching. If we were to come together as a community of academics, with the main motive to advance education for ALL, then we will have to move out from "behind the desk and in front of the screen" approaches to learning and teaching. We will have to commit foremost to equity and admit that a focus only on equality (loaning and providing access to devices) would be a regressive, toxic, discriminatory and oppressive move towards recovery plans for the township and village student.

### **This is an injustice**

The provision of tangible hardware and software detracts from the psychosocial effects and impact that Coronavirus has had in township and village communities. Post-traumatic stress from the presence of the police and the army in communities, the unintended consequences of such deployment, the inability to attend the burial of loved ones, the indignity of the mass COVID-19 testing, the uncertainty of meals, not being able to pray in churches as a community, escalating domestic violence during lockdown, vandalism of schools, and the list continues. To see learning and teaching as a standalone activity is to discriminate against township and village students. In addition, by offering them a later time to complete their qualifications, while others in their classes can still complete in minimum time online, is simply unjust.

Let us look at the big picture: the world is reeling from a virus that we have no hold over. All these efforts of salvaging 2020 without a focus on fairness towards poor people, who generally have little opportunity because of circumstances beyond their control, will be meaningless if Coronavirus wipes us all out! This is what Coronavirus can do to us! ☀

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