



# WHICH CAME FIRST, THE VIRUS OR THE "ICING"?: CHALLENGES TO COMBATING COVID-19 IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed serious governance challenges across the world. For citizens in Central Africa, the challenges are even direr given decades of graft and plunder by eternal political despots who have diverted large sums of critical resources away from healthcare, sanitation, and emergency relief, and into their own bank accounts in foreign, secret tax-havens. Consequently, there is a heightened risk of death by Covid-19 in Cameroon, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, and Equatorial Guinea.

**In Brazzaville**, the government has turned a blind eye on security forces accused of using the coronavirus curfew to loot, as the regime needs to ensure the military's alliance in order to retain its grip of power over a worsening economy. A journalist has been illegally banned from anchoring prime time news on national television because of questions about Covid-19 patients management.

**In N'Djamena**, health capacities are insufficient, as they have been undermined by embezzlement and the disastrous management of the meagre funds allocated to COVID-19. As usual, the Chadian authorities managed in a very catastrophic way this pandemic by leaving Chadians without real coverage.

Furthermore, chaos rules **in Malabo**. The military keeps harassing citizens looking for food. The government arrested and imprisoned a nurse for voicing her opinion; while at least two patients died after the hospitals refused to admit them for care. The Vice President, now in charge also of the Pandemic response can boast about having spent more money to acquire one luxury vehicle, than the public funds his government has devoted to combating COVID-19.

**In Yaounde**, despite the frighteningly increasing number and rate of positive cases, no containment measures have been announced by the public authorities. The government has authorized the reopening of bars and restaurants while asking citizens to wear a mask. Similarly, the government has authorized commercial airlines to resume flights into Cameroon, while cases continue to soar daily according to the account by the Minister of Health.

In all four countries, secrecy in the management of Covid-19 funds is the norm. How the relevant ministries and government agencies spend public funds, how donations from the international community and private corporations, and individuals are spent remains a mystery to the average citizen. Civil society and communities at large are kept in the dark.

In all these cases, the pandemic shows how kleptocrats sacrifice the common good in favor of their personal wealth. These are just the latest manifestations of the greed that fuels corruption and poverty in the region.

Follow our stories, where we show you how kleptocrats in these countries have amassed vast riches while depriving their people of basic needs such as running water, education, healthcare, and fundamental freedoms.