



Voice of the Voiceless, Soon the Poor to be Blamed for Covid-19?

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THERE is eagerness from the rich and middle classes to overburden the poor. The outrage about people who behaved as if “it was business usual” is greatly confusing. Are the rich and middle classes really concerned about lives of the poor, or are they worried that poor will infect them all of a sudden?

I think the latter could be the case.

Coronavirus will soon be poor man’s burden. Concerns are not on those who brought the virus in Bedfordview or Sandton or even the tourists who roam our streets. It looks like everyone is desperate to see SA enter Stage 4 (local transmissions), then the poor will be blamed for the situation they didn’t create or they don’t even know how it came about.

Someone calls the coronavirus a ‘business class’ disease, to denote that it was brought by international travelers wherever they went. Therefore, a suggestion was that all efforts to control the disease should have been directed at these people, and their foreign visitors. Unfortunately, they rush back to their high-walled estates after sneezing. Then they claim to comply with instructions since they ‘care’ about the poor multitudes catching the disease.

“Stay at home!”

So they scream from their nice apartments and mansions. They are telling someone who lives in a packed yard with 45 other people, where there is no entertainment or even a couch to sit on. Just like people such as Kenneth Meshoe or Boris Johnson, the privileged they are fully aware that it is easier for them to self-isolate. But many of the people in townships and squatter camps can’t: the living conditions simply don’t permit.

“Wash your hands!”

With what water, when most people don’t even drinking water to speak of. A large majority of South Africans work in the informal sector where it is mandatory to go out and hassle in order to buy food and other necessities for hygiene like soap to wash hands. Suddenly, the longstanding apartheid spatial settlement problem has to disappear over night. Taxis don’t run and people are running out of food, and many have to go work where they earn peanuts to survive.

Still, the rich and middle classes insist *“We are in this together!”*

But when Day 1 ended, media and middle classes were going crazy over noncompliers and even suggesting that soldiers should use brute and force to keep them home. Human rights and dignity no longer applies because it is the poor? Police already clashed with people in Hillbrow and had to use teargas, as a precursor of what is likely to come as money finishes and small groceries run out.

Day 11 or possible extension of the lockdown as cases climb means another lockdown is likely. The shack will also be too hot to live in for another ten days. Children will be too hungry to obey. They will rush to the streets in numbers in search for life, and money to survive. And they will be welcomed on board by Captain Covid-19. Then there will be a serious crisis in a country that already struggles to deal with unemployment, poverty, crime and other social ills.

Inevitably, we will blame the poor (not referring to drunkards and delinquents) for not understanding that “this is about saving them!”

Why should they care as they stare death each day of their lives in any way?

What many people should be careful of not doing is to overburden the poor in their push to deal with the spread of the virus. People are suddenly expected to behave or listen to rules governing the lockdown. As dangerous as the situation can be, it is unlikely that they will have propensity to listen to anyone, let alone staying at home when stomachs are empty.

We forget that no boot of a soldier can stop 30 million hungry mouths.

These are people whom have generally been neglected, who die from hunger, poverty, crime, diseases and economic exclusion. Invisible citizens. They will defy any forceful attempt to make them to cooperate since they are surprised at why they are now a centre of focus. They have grown not to trust anyone in their daily struggles to survive.

Somewhere Sipho is wondering: My poverty and lack of water was not serious enough to need everybody because my plight is not contagious? Why should I stay at home? He has always faced hardship alone and there were no one sent to stop poverty and hunger from infecting him. He is bruised and dead poor to care about anything.

Sipho has faced danger all his life, in fact death for him is an okapi or bullet away as he rush home in mornings and evenings from work in one of the affluent suburbs in town. The person who claims to care for him has never seen the need of paying living wage. With the coronavirus on sight, this monster will infect him and still claim to be concerned.

The poor are probably asking each other: Why does everyone suddenly cares about them now?