

Seychelles is in a most precarious situation although, so far, it has been able to keep the number of COVID 19 positive cases to only 11 in a population of about 100,000 people. All eleven cases were either imported or linked to an imported case. There has not been any evidence of community transmission.

Since the start of the pandemic, tourism, the main pillar of the economy has died completely and the two other pillars, (fisheries and financial services) are struggling amid a two-month border closure in Seychelles and sustained lockdowns in Europe, America and Asia. Further, the national currency has lost 30% of its value of January 2020 meaning that the health budget, which lies heavily on importation of supplies, has shrunk considerably.

Despite the country's best effort to continue on its path to provide universal health coverage, already the health system is bearing the brunt of the collateral damage. Essential supplies are running critically short. Major health programmes and services are slowly but surely falling by the wayside as resources are redeployed to respond to the epidemic and to adjust to the growing scarcity.

At the same time as addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, the country has seen a resurgence of dengue and leptospirosis. A rising number of Tuberculosis cases - not associated with HIV - has aroused significant concern. An unprecedented, for recent times, cluster of measles, preceded the COVID situation.

While all this is going on, on the communicable diseases front, the chronic diseases (cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and chronic respiratory illnesses) persist. Non-communicable diseases and the risk factors responsible for them (all combined) are prevalent in up to 60% of the population.

Successfully doing entirely new things and doing old things in a new way to respond to these mammoth challenges require not just significant adjustments and compromises but also ample time.

Until and unless there is a solution to the global pandemic, Seychelles' economic and health gains of yesteryears will erode very fast. The climb back up will be far longer and far more difficult than the slide.

Now and in the foreseeable future Seychelles will need all the support that it can get.