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Although accounting for 17% of the global population, only 2.5% of recorded global deaths resulting from Covid-19 were recorded in Africa by the end of October 2020. This is attributed at least partly to the young median age of the population in many African countries.

Despite relatively low case fatality rates related to Covid-19, Africa experienced a significant economic impact of the pandemic - with only 15% of Africa's trade occurring within the continent (36% of annual trade volume is with Europe, 14% is with China and 6% is with the UnitedStates) and 8.5% of Africa's GDP stemming from tourism, the economy is closely connected to global markets.

GDP in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to contract by 3% in 2020 and return to 2019 levels in 2021. South Africa, the second-largest economy by GDP on the continent, is particularly affected by the economic slowdown, and is forecast to decline by 7.8% in 2020 and to see only a mild rebound of 3.1% in 2021.

The impact on demand was significant, driven by the contraction of the economy and measures to contain the pandemic. South Africa, for example, experienced a 23% year-on-year drop in electricity demand in April, and lower, but still significant, reductions in May (14%) and June (5%). Overall, South Africa's electricity demand is expected to decline by more than 5% in 2020 compared to the previous year. For the whole continent, a demand reduction of around 2% is expected.

The African electricity sector is characterised by its large geography, limited interconnection and trade, improving electrification and prevailing system adequacy issues. In the most recent World Bank Doing Business 2020, customers in 10 of the 24 African participants (42%) experienced on average at least 24hours of outages over the period May 2018-May 2019, while 19 (79%) experienced at least 2hours of outages. In comparison, only 5% of European countries had customers experiencing at least 24hours of outages, while Asia reported 13%.

While electricity trade between countries is relatively small due to poor interconnection, a number of regional power pools exist to encourage regional co-operation through the development of projects of regional importance.

Meanwhile, in southern Africa a tender was launched in February 2020 for the construction of an



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interconnector between Mozambique and Malawi, which would connect Southern African Power Pool member Malawi to the rest of the power pool for the first time.

While load shedding is something that is endured throughout the continent due to capacity shortages, persistent drought and a lack of investment, this has not always been the case in South Africa.

However, in 2018 the current electricity crisis in South Africa was demonstrated again via load shedding and has been worsening ever since, culminating in 2019 when load shedding reached Stage 6 (or a capacity shortage of 6000MW) for the first time in December of that year. Prior to this, the worst load shedding that had been experienced was Stage 4, or a shortage of 4000MW.

At the beginning of 2020 a similar trend continued until demand greatly reduced in late March due to a lockdown to contain Covid-19. The lockdown, one of the hardest in the world, where freedom to travel and non-essential services were severely limited, began on the 27March 2020 and was gradually relaxed from 1May in a staged approach. During the initial lockdown, the deviation of net demand from original forecasts was in excess of 11000MW, and on average almost 6000MW during weekdays.

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