

Postcard: The world as we know it, November 2022

This week has been a rollercoaster and I feel that I have understood something more of the world that we live in, and compelled to share.

After much planning and preparation, we at Beyond Stigma were all set to travel to Zimbabwe this week and work with our amazing friends there in Africaid Zvandiri and a group of phenomenal young people living with HIV - we have been working together for the past eight months delivering a programme half online and half in-person on self-stigma and shame - I would never have believed that it was possible to work like this online. This makes me excited as I see that the future of development looks very different to the past. When we talk about building capacity, empowerment and sustainability - COVID-19 has forced us to meet these three head on and find innovative, creative and feasible solutions that work - amazing right!



NO-ONE IS
SAFE
UNTIL
EVERYONE IS
SAFE.

So as we prepare for travelling this week two things happen that make it impossible. Firstly the growing tension and civil unrest in Ethiopia meant that our flights routed through Addis Ababa were not a good idea - in the same week, Irish diplomats were asked to leave the country and many countries issued a directive to foreigners living in Ethiopia to leave immediately. Tensions are high and like all situations of unrest, it is unpredictable. Then secondly having changed our flights to a different routing, on the day we were to travel, with the emergence of the new Omicron variant, flights were suspended in and out of Zimbabwe along with other Southern African countries. Mandatory quarantine regulations fast being introduced across European countries and some flights left Zimbabwe, only to be turned back in mid flight.

On the one hand, we could not travel because of civil unrest. Ethiopia, a beautiful country that had one of the fastest growing economies in the world – it has been doing so well showing leadership to bring peace and stability to the region and has invested heavily in its people and in reforms. The current violence seriously threatens the economic gains and is creating an escalating humanitarian crisis.

On the other hand, we could not travel because of the emergence of a new variant of COVID-19 in South Africa. This has caused widespread fear and countries are responding by locking down borders in an effort to contain this new variant. This stinks of vaccine inequity – all of the strong words by advocates and scientists like Mike Ryan of World Health Organization “no-one is safe until we are all safe” unheeded. Instead of understanding this and getting behind this early on in the pandemic, countries in the West hoarded vaccines while countries in the Global South watched on. Until everyone is vaccinated, the pandemic will continue to thrive, to mutate and to threaten (for those in Ireland, you can do

something now – sign the petition www.peoplesvaccine.ie) . With the delay in getting vaccines to the developing world, vaccine hesitancy has increased and I know from friends in countries in Africa, there is big mistrust and a lot of fake news being spread that will take some undoing in months and years to come.

What strikes me this week is a real appreciation that this is our new world. Not meaning to sound dramatic but the world as we knew it over the past 25 years is gone and our new world is one of unpredictability that requires all of us to be flexible and adaptable and to drop any notion of control. What we can do is embrace the new - new ways of working, of travelling, of connecting, of innovating and of speaking out when we see injustice. Thinking of all those families and people who feel isolated, unable to travel home to loved ones and feeling uncertain about what this new variant means.

For our part, we will continue with an online version of our programme and just pivot, as life requires. For those who were so kind to donate items to take to our friends in Zimbabwe, we will hold onto everything and bring them as soon as we can travel.
[#development](#) [#COVID19](#)

By Nadine Ferris France, Dublin, November 2021

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