The Covid-19 pandemic has also seen an increase in prices of essential services. Bus fares rose by 50% because of reduced passenger numbers due to social distancing requirements.

The KNBS report found that there had been a 51.7% increase in the cost of fares. In Kenya, where 300,000 people have lost their jobs because of the virus, civil society activity has grown sufficiently to persuade President Uhuru Kenyatta to order the Ministry of Health to publish details of all contracts issued and sums paid out.

Particular attention will be paid to the activities of the Kenya Medical Supplies Agency (Kemsa) at the centre of an alleged US$400m scandal that has prompted strikes at ill-equipped hospitals, and street protests (see main article on Kenya). There have been further cases in South Africa, Nigeria and Uganda, all relating to greedy officials trying to enrich themselves.

Beyond this regrettable sidebar, the main focus is turning towards trying to rebuild economies and strategise how to share in the anticipated vaccine roll-out.

Resurrecting economies is of course difficult when you hold very few economic trump cards and depend on others to buy your primary products. So, while public health officials are still calling for extreme care, the business-minded are desperately trying to kick-start international trade.

Ghana’s Kotoka Airport opened to international flights on September 2nd, and Nigeria reopened Lagos and Abuja on September 5th. In Nigeria, only a reduced number of flights are allowed, with a total cap of 1,280 international passengers allowed to land at these two airports each day. No incoming flight can carry more than 200 passengers, though outbound aircraft have no such restriction on numbers.

But the news comes with complexities: both countries require arriving travellers to have obtained a PCR negative Covid-19 test prior to departure, and while Ghana then undertakes a further test on all passengers prior to them collecting their baggage, Nigeria asks visitors to isolate for seven days and then take a second PCR test before venturing out.

The difference in requirements by countries is also a big problem at land borders. Africa CDC, which is trying to see if it can use its African Union (AU) roots to harmonise the process, assesses that 25 countries have pre-departure requirements for visitors coming into their airports, and six are testing passengers on arrival. (Africa Confidential 11/9)

Mauritius
Oil Spill Protest

Public anger boils over with the biggest demonstration in 40 years.

Tens of thousands of Mauritians protested on August 29th in the capital Port Louis over the government’s handling of a giant oil spill off its pristine Indian Ocean coast.

The Japanese bulk carrier MV Wakashio crashed into a reef off southeastern Mauritius in August (p.23079C), spewing more than 1,000 tonnes of oil into waters that are home to mangrove forests and endangered species. After the boat split in two, the larger piece was towed out to sea and sunk, but the smaller section remains stranded on the reef.

The call for the march came from an ordinary citizen, Jean Bruneau Laurette, who has become a hero among many for daring to oppose Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth. Laurette, a maritime security expert, says the government has been hiding the truth about the circumstances of the oil spill. He has filed a case against the Environment Ministry.

Up to 75,000 protesters thronged the square in front of the cathedral in downtown Port-Louis, an AFP reporter said, in the biggest demonstration in 40 years. Many protesters carried the national flag, sang the national anthem, and called for Jugnauth to step down. Public anger has boiled over in Mauritius after at least 34 melon-headed whales were found dead or seriously ill near the site of the spill.

Fisheries Minister Sudheer Maudhoo had said there was “no trace of hydrocarbons on them or in their respiratory system”. “This rally is an occasion to send a message to tell Pravind Jugnauth he has messed up,” marcher Jocelyne Leung, 35, told AFP.

Authorities and experts from Japan and Britain are still investigating the true extent of the ecological damage to an island whose economy depends heavily on tourism.