



THE SMARTPHONE PANDEMIC

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

AIM To study the political and societal implications of the use of smartphone technologies and big data in public health authorities' responses to the Covid-19 pandemic

METHODS Document review and qualitative case studies conducted between 2020 and 2022 in Sierra Leone, Myanmar, Japan, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and Norway

TEAM Anthropologists, international relations scholars, and political philosophers from 7 countries

DIGITAL CONTACT TRACING

- Experimental solution developed at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic based on theoretical evidence of effectiveness from mathematical models
- Heated debate around privacy and digital surveillance issues
- Joint Google–Apple exposure notification system developed using Bluetooth and decentralized storage integrated in government apps, with T&C dictated by the companies
- Effectiveness evaluations rarely integrated and limited evidence about its public health value as a complement to 'manual' contact tracing or its value for users – privacy safeguards prevent scrutiny of data

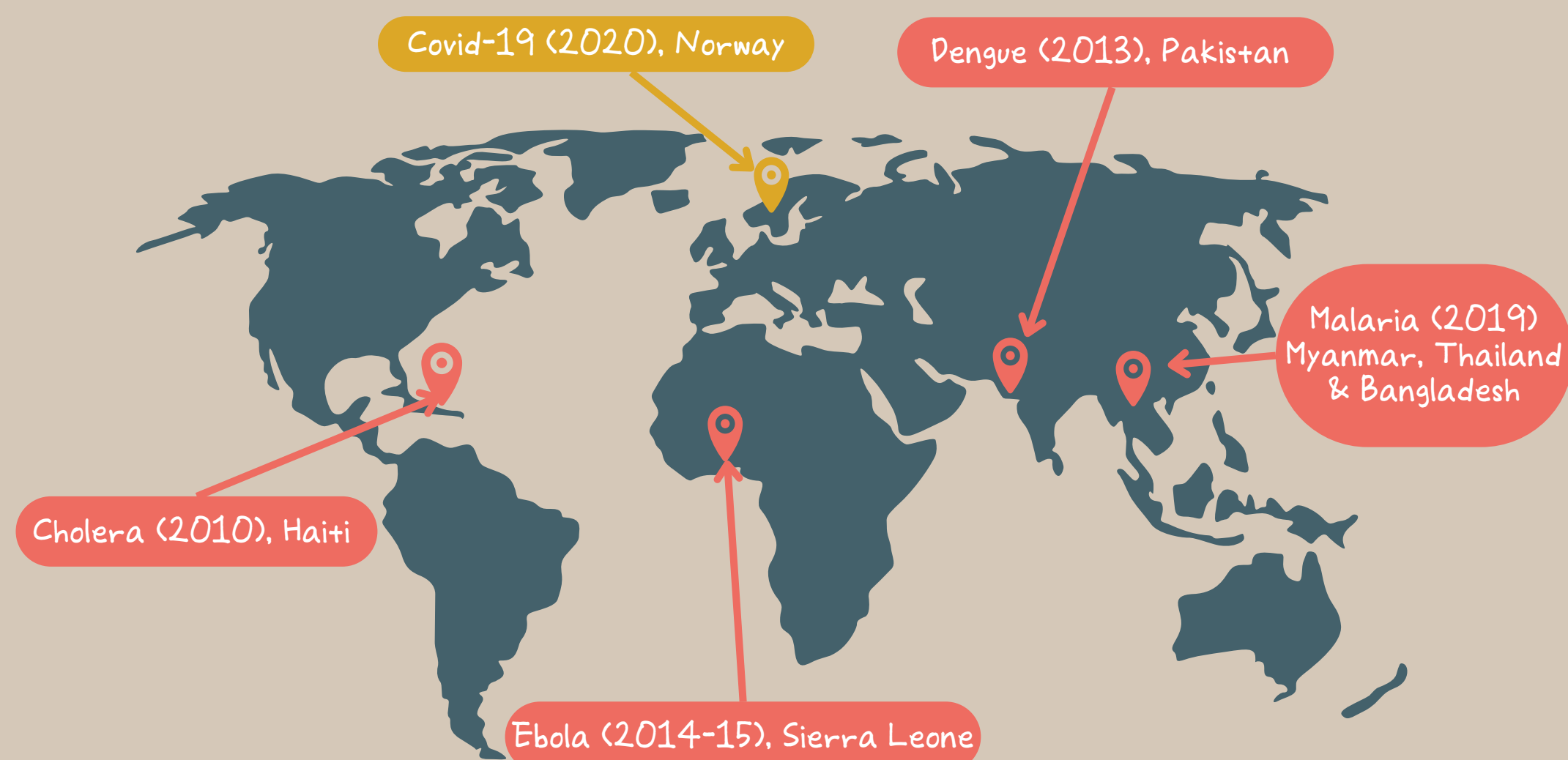
Download the app to "get back our everyday life and freedom"

Erna Solberg, 16 April 2020



SMARTPHONE MOBILITY DATA

- Since 2010, telecom and tech companies have partnered with scientists to model the spread of diseases by using aggregated location data generated by mobile phones operators and apps
- Initially part 'Big Data for Social Good' Corporate Social Responsibility schemes in low-income countries facing epidemics
- Adopted in the first days of the Covid-19 pandemic in Norway and other rich countries and became an important tool for policy makers to have projections about the spread of the virus and measure the effectiveness of mobility restrictions



Modelling disease spread with big data – an historic overview

TAKE-AWAYS ABOUT SMARTPHONE-BASED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE

#3 MARKET INTERESTS

#1 EXPERIMENTATION

Adopted by public health authorities based on experimentation and limited theoretical evidence



Need for rigorous evaluation of effectiveness and discussion of political consequences

#2 PARTNERSHIPS



Ushered in new forms of partnerships between 'Big Tech' and telecoms corporations and public health authorities

Need for transparency and regulation



Mobility data monetized, e.g. for traffic control, public security and epidemic forecasting

Solidified the market dominance of Big Tech companies and normalized their role in the highly profitable health market

Need for scrutiny of private-sector incursion in healthcare and health data markets

KEY REFERENCES