

The Global Impact of COVID-19



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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

It has been almost a year since the first case of a mysterious new corona virus was detected in China. Christened as the SARS-CoV-2, this virus spread quickly to all corners of the world to precipitate a global pandemic now known as COVID-19. As of November 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has claimed more than 1.3 million lives (WHO) and has caused the worst global economic contraction of the past 80 years (IMF). The concerted global efforts to develop a vaccine to curb this pandemic have finally borne fruit as a major breakthrough seems to be on the horizon. This is also an appropriate time to evaluate the global impact of this unprecedented crisis on our interconnected world.

This issue of *Southasiadisasters.net* is titled 'The Global Impact of COVID-19', and highlights the consequences, implications, risks and opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic on our current world order. The pandemic and its response, in the form of protracted nationwide lockdowns have had several short-term as well as long term impacts on human health, society, economy and environment. For instance, the severe lockdowns imposed in certain countries have actually caused a widespread economic and humanitarian crisis. Therefore, it is important to draw important lessons from this pandemic to amplify our future preparedness and response capacities to similar shocks.

This issue of *Southasiadisasters.net* takes stock of the major sectors and stakeholders that been adversely impacted by the pandemic. It underscores the impact of COVID-19 on gender outcomes, humanitarian action, biodiversity linked response; role of civil society; sustainable business planning; food security and water security among others. Read on to know more. ■

THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF CORONA

The Corona Crisis as a Humanitarian Problem: Power Structures, Localisation, and the Study of Humanitarian Action

By Mihir R. Bhatt*, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute

It is my great pleasure to be here and an honour to address the following two important and somewhat overwhelming questions.

I am glad that this corrective role has been taken up seriously by us all here. What I wish to suggest is a major and urgent shift from the current academic studies to "new" academic studies where voices are as much important on "peer review", and first person accurate matter more than statistically substantiated "facts".

We must move from building on existing knowledge to challenge existing knowledge, and in fact offer alternative knowledge.

We must move from our current position of research to many more positions, and validate each position.

We must move from analysis to synthesis and give prescriptions to move ahead.

We must move from understanding the crisis to setting agenda for addressing the crisis.

We must move to multiple ways of accountability to multiple actors.

We must iterate with case from individual to collective to individual without being positioned in any one.

We must review access to people, more direct access.

We must move from sizable economic model- neo-liberal- to set humanitarian action into multiple economic models including doughnut economy and circular economy and economy of nurturance.

We must move from economic centric to economic and ecology collaborative humanitarian action.

We must move from mainstream environments to marginal

environments such as deltas and deserts and coastal metro slums.

We must move from field visit to remote learning.

We must move from health as a purely medical item that costs money, to health as wellbeing central to any humanitarian action.

We must just not de-centralise power alone but devolve power, give up and let it go.

We must move from formal corporate structure of INGOs to informal, seamless, self-organising multicultural initiatives.

Was this pandemic a humanitarian war?

It seemed like one in our human cities.

Why not have a State of Humanitarian Studies Report?

Humanitarian studies have a corrective role to play, and I am glad that role is underlined here, and not the role of validating what is already on its way ahead.

Humanitarian actions are set in a context, including an economic context, but this neo-liberal economic context can prevent us from achieving better humanitarian outcomes and results.

Humanitarian studies must pick up areas of overlap between economic and humanitarian action. What can humanitarian studies do to lead us to a more social, sustainable and greener economy as both, part of recovery as well as a part of preparedness? ■

* presented at NCHS-IHSA Webinar on Corona crisis and implications for humanitarian studies on August 20, 2020 with Tanya Wood; Thea Hillhorst; Kristoffer Liden; and Maria Gabrielsen Jumbert.

Pandemic Preparedness, Response and Recovery – What to do and how

By **Loy Rego**, MARS Practitioners Network, VERVE Volunteers Program India and Myanmar

The 1918-1920 influenza pandemic ("Spanish Flu") killed over 40 million people. Subsequent outbreaks were the 1957 Asian, and 1968 Hong Kong influenza pandemic.

Epidemics since 1995

Over the last 25 years, we have seen **smaller epidemics** (Avian Influenza, SARS, MERS, Ebola), **confined** to certain **regions/ countries**

A significant public health (PH) threat due to a pandemic occurred in 1997 with H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), virulent among birds near Hong Kong (HK), severely infected humans, pushing PH officials to take action, ring a global alarm on this new virus, and successfully intervened to control its spread, destroying the entire HK poultry population.

Since then, multi country epidemics have occurred in different parts of the world, particularly in Asia and Africa, with some impacts beyond regions directly impacted

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) a viral respiratory disease appeared in November 2002 in southern China, imported through human-to-human transmission chains by February 2003 to other areas including Canada, HK, Chinese Taipei, Singapore, and Viet Nam. SARS was a highly contagious, emerging infectious disease (EID) spreading through small saliva droplet aerosols and contact transmission, spread along international air travel routes, and indirectly via surfaces touched by someone infected. Most SARS patients were healthy adults (25-70 years), with few cases of children under 15 years, and case fatality

among suspected patients around 3%.

Subsequently we have seen H1N1 outbreaks in 2009 and H7N9 avian influenza or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012.

Later **Ebola** impacted West Africa in December 2013, starting in Guinea, rapidly spreading to neighbouring Liberia and Sierra Leone. In August 2014, WHO declared the epidemic an international PH emergency. In December 2015, 42 days after the last person tested negative for a second time, Guinea was declared Ebola free, with 90-days heightened surveillance "The three countries - stopped the original chains of transmission and the outbreak was declared no longer an emergency in March 2016.

Pandemic Preparedness

The global scale of the 2019 'coronavirus' pandemic, had an **unexpected, devastating impact on life as we know it**, planet wide. The times are similar to the Indian Ocean wide **Tsunami** of December 2004 which impacted both Asia and Africa, just before the Kobe conference of Jan 2005 which adopted a substantive HFA. The **continent-wide recognition of tsunami risk**, response and recovery programming, **transformed** institutions and programmes in over a dozen countries.

Pandemic preparedness as a focus for emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and risk reduction was actively discussed by WHO, UNISDR, and other agencies and by **medical emergency response and disaster preparedness professionals for 15 years**, and implicitly since 1990,

the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. Three key frameworks, the International Health Regulations (**IHR 2005**), the Hyogo Framework for Action (**HFA**) 2005-15, and the current Sendai Framework for DRR-2015-2030 (**SFDRR**) adopted in 2015 are all relevant to pandemics. **SFDRR** explicitly mentions **health risks systematically**, and the emergency health fraternity has been a key part of this dialogue.

The **pandemic's global scale, the freefall of economies in the shortest time frame with devastating impact** on all sectors, and the **massive shutdown** response is **unprecedented**.

Efforts to integrate Pandemic Preparedness with wider disaster preparedness

SARS in 2003, an infectious pandemic caused by an influenza virus triggered action by national governments, businesses, local authorities, disaster management/civil defense, military, community organizations and citizens' groups in affected Asia countries, and awareness throughout the world. **PREVENT a global pandemic preparedness** USAID funded programme was implemented from 2005-2011 by WHO, WFP, FAO and WTO, involved thousands of organizations, professionals and volunteer workers to reduce risks of infection, complementing animal and public health professionals work on preventing novel diseases emerging, limiting transmission between species and reducing severity through biomedical interventions.

The **Towards a Safer World initiative (TASW)** - Sept 2010 - Dec

2011, convened a diverse, multi-sector, multi-regional stakeholder network including partners from business and military. TASW's **objective** were improving capabilities of committed champions and their institutions of this approach through applying best practice, simulations, capacity-building, training and research. TASW's **goal** was to make whole-of-society preparedness more effective to lessen the economic, social and humanitarian impact of pandemics, and high-impact risks, mainstream it widely and learn to work together.

TASW documented experiences of multi-sector planning in different countries, among groups of stakeholders across 11 thematic areas: global health, community, private sector, animal health, logistics, communications, travel and tourism; focusing on what, how and where lessons learnt from pandemic preparedness could be applied, available at www.towardsasafeworld.org

Key conclusions were 1) Political leaders commitment is critical, 2) Government, civil society, and private sector must work together for effective preparedness, 3) Maintain critical services, good practice in business continuity and epidemic contingency planning, 4) Periodically run, well-designed simulation exercises, 5) Good communication practice in crisis preparedness/ response, 6) Invest greater innovative financing in preparedness practice.

International Health Regulations (IHR), 2005: their reference to Pandemics

IHR 2005 entered into force in June 2007 as an international legal agreement "to prevent, protect against, control and provide PH response to international disease, avoiding unnecessary interference with international trade", requiring 194 WHO states to strengthen

national PH capacities, surveillance, response, communication and reporting to WHO within 24 hours after identification/ assessment of PH threats.

IHR helps nations work together, protects the public and should be strengthened. Legal agreements for sharing biological materials and benefits should help multi-level effective response.

Many countries lack capacity to prevent, and respond to health emergencies. WHO uses unofficial reports from other sources to improve surveillance, allow faster information exchange facilitated by newer technologies (social media), helping national/ global health authorities implement effective response to PH emergencies.

Other infectious disease within animal populations is reported by World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH). These two communities and reporting mechanisms have tripartite arrangement between WHO, WOAH, and FAO for timelier PH response.

Operationalisation by WHO, strengthening and reform

The global health community, focusses on when an influenza pandemic would occur. WHO and states prepare for PH emergencies, do surveillance of influenza through **136 national influenza centers in 106 countries**, strengthen their capacity and develop **national influenza pandemic preparedness (PP) plans**

In 2009, WHO commissioned an independent *Review on IHR (2005) Functioning for Pandemic*, it's first international PH emergency. 74 % countries had PP plans of varying qualities in place before 2009. Key conclusions were: i) IHR helped better preparedness for PH emergencies, but core national/ local capacities in IHR are not yet fully

operational and implemented worldwide, ii) WHO performed well, confronted systemic difficulties but demonstrated shortcomings, but no evidence of malfeasance, iii) The world is ill-prepared to respond to a severe pandemic or global, sustained PH emergency. Global preparedness must advance through research, multi-sector action, strengthened health-care delivery systems, economic development in low/middle-income countries, and improved health status".

The investment in pandemic preparedness proved valuable not only for influenza outbreaks but other PH threats, e.g. Jamaica used its national influenza plan in 2007 malaria response. Existing national plans and implementation capacities must address existing gaps, a focus on avian influenza, not pandemic influenza, clarify CSO role in government plans, and lack of preparation for non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as social distancing". (*Humanitarian PPI review*).

Pandemic preparedness has strengthened coordination mechanisms nationally/ internationally for other emergencies. Many countries developed interdisciplinary taskforces nationally / sub-nationally to coordinate pandemic responses, including non-traditional actors, NGOs, private sector, and media. These taskforces worked for other PH threats, including 2010 yellow fever/ 2011 Ebola outbreaks in Uganda and extreme weather in Europe, bringing together key stakeholders, fostering better communication, generating faster, more effective responses.

We are **not well prepared for global emergencies** and **need** stronger, implementable global and national disaster **preparedness** and response **plans**. Helping countries implement IHR as designed is needed.

Health emergency response for multiple hazards/levels and broader future changes we must make

Let us reflect, in our local communities, cities / districts, states / regions/ nations on how effective our specific pandemic response has been?

How well prepared are we to deal with simultaneous occurrence of cyclones, floods and earthquakes and the wider risk environment?

We have initiated simplifications in lifestyle, drastically reduced international travel, widened access and reduced costs through new

modalities of global meetings virtually have with positive environmental impacts. We have innovatively used new communication during the lockdown, opened up Zoom, What's App, Skype and Twitter, increased communication frequency and social interaction at lower costs, built new relationships and permanently altered interaction.

How have we responded to new patterns of migrant movement back to their original sites? Have we done them justice?

We must innovate food habits, travel compulsions, and

leisure, learning from changes we are living through, innovate, expand and transfer positive changes. We should seize the moment, build local systems, begin anew, creatively demonstrate living simply. What new behavioural changes and environmental actions can we promote / institutionalise? Will we adapt to these transformative changes? How can we localised development impact ahead. Finding answers and taking action is our humble way of contributing to social change needed transition. ■

REIMAGINING PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Evaluating Unintended Consequences of Pandemic Response

By Mihir R. Bhatt, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute

What are the unintended and harmful consequences of pandemic response? This difficult question becomes even more difficult as several lockdown and social distancing efforts across countries in South Asia come to an end, at least for now. What are these unintended consequences? To what degree are they harmful? Harmful to the pandemic victims? And what is the nature and extent of such harm? And what can be done about reducing the negative impact of such work on the most vulnerable – elderly, women, children, migrant urban workers, women farm workers, and minorities? These are the questions coming up in discussions among the local research and action community in South Asia as early response actions are coming to a stage of slow down and take off, both. How do we look at the world falling apart for so many at the same time, facing brute fear, top-down, suppressing all hope for future?

Though not directly about pandemic response, a recent article by Tanja R. Muller from the University of Manchester, UK,

titled “Protection of Civilians Mandates and ‘Collateral Damage’ of UN Peacekeeping Mission: Histories of Refugees from Darfur” ([click here](#)) offers a useful way to look at unintended consequences. What she offers is a way, and there may be many more ways that we can find out or invent to understand the unintended consequences of pandemic response.

While evaluating pandemic response we must look at unintended consequences, and the harmful impact on the pandemic affected population, in addition to the impact on other key local actors involved. We must focus on local response staff on the ground to test, isolate, and treat the pandemic victims. We must look at who is by passing human rights of victims and overlooking the civil liberties of at risk populations and why? These questions are coming up in the discussions on webinars and other digital dialogues in South Asia, for example at the recent webinar on Cities and Disasters: Resilience and Mitigation by National Institute Disaster Management of India.

Does pandemic response system (or its early version, however scattered and ad-hoc it may be) has inbuilt mechanisms to prevent potential harm to frontline medical, public, and community health workers? Municipal and police staff? To what degree was the protection of these “frontline” was on the response agenda? And how did the authorities – central to subnational to local – receive their actions and presence? Even when their health security is threatened or compromised? These are additional question coming up in dialogue and discussion among local civil society in South Asia, for example at the recent webinar on Women and Work by Dhaka University and Duryog Nivaran.

A focus on coherence, collaboration, coordination, impact, and other humanitarian action evaluation objectives are due for a re-look, both, in the short term and in the long term to capture the unintended consequences of pandemic response. There are several suitable platforms to initiate this process. But will they? ■

What can be done to make Local Actors Central to COVID-19 National Response?

By Sudhanshu S. Singh, Chief Executive Officer, *Humanitarian Aid International*, Haryana, India



A quick review of the COVID-19 response in India, since the nationwide lockdown was announced on 24th March 2020, would reveal that two factors, i.e., local actors and local resource mobilisation, ensured early response. Therefore, instead of discussing 'what can be done to make local actors central to COVID-19 national response' the more relevant question would be, 'what can be done to ensure that local actors continue being central to COVID-19 response'.

What mars the response capacity of local actors, is the lack of direct access to funding, insufficient operation and overhead cost, exclusion from coordination and decision-making platforms and being treated by big (international) actors as cheap implementers through sub-contracting of projects. All the processes, emanating out of the *World Humanitarian Summit* (WHS), acknowledge the role of local actors in being the first and effective responders to crises. One of the 24 transformations proposed

by *Agenda for Humanity* suggests 'reinforce, do not replace local and national systems. One of the 51 commitments of the *Grand Bargain* commits passing on at least 25% of the global humanitarian funding to local and national actors by 2020. The same is reaffirmed by the signatories of *Charter4Change* also along with seven more commitments to strengthen local response mechanism.

In spite of these commitments made four years ago, the recent annual reports show abysmal progress made on the commitments. Not much has changed in the power structure and the factors constantly marginalising local actors. The 2020 annual report of *Grand Bargain*¹ remains silent on the percentage funding being passed on to local/national actors. However, according to the *Financial Tracking Service* (FTS) only 3.7% of the global humanitarian funding reached the local actors in 2019, which is down from 3.92% passed on in 2018.

The revised Global Humanitarian

Response Plan for COVID-19², launched for 63 countries with a budgetary requirement of \$6.71 billion, while acknowledges the role of local actors and considering it another opportunity to improve delivery on the *Grand Bargain* commitments, fails to make firm commitments on the percentage of funding to be passed on to local actors. The GHRP commitment again revolves around the flexible funding, simplified reporting and better access to local actors through Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPF), which is important but not enough.

All these UN-centric frameworks are less relevant in India, but that doesn't make the situation any better. The Indian humanitarian and development architecture are largely influenced by country offices of international NGOs. *Humanitarian Aid International* (HAI) has come up with a policy paper entitled, 'Why is it important to have Local Funds for Local Actors'³, published by *FIDC/RIS*.

COVID-19 response is more complex and different as the NGO sector is primarily dealing with the secondary-impacted community, i.e., the large number of people facing socio-economic stress due to the prolonged period of lockdown, disruption in informal sector and the business slowdown. Restriction on global and national travels has brought local actors at the forefront of the response, but as the weeks

1 <https://www.odi.org/publications/17044-grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2020>

2 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/age>

[ing/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2020/05/GHRP-COVID-19_May_Update.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/age)

3 https://fidc.ris.org.in/sites/default/files/FIDC%20policy%20brief%2310%20_Final.pdf

have passed, we are again witnessing them going in the background. The long-term impact of COVID-19 has yet to be ascertained as the pandemic is still unfolding and normalcy has yet to be restored. Meanwhile, a number of natural disasters have also struck different parts of India. Needs of people, affected by these disasters, have largely been overlooked as the COVID-19 response has already strained the resources. Given this, it is imperative to strengthen the local response mechanism based on long-term programming and a (humanitarian-development) nexus approach.

Following recommendations are made to ensure that local actors remain central to COVID-19 response:

- donors should try establishing direct partnership with local actors to reduce the number of intermediaries and thereby ensuring that maximum resources reach the people.
- instead of risk transfer, emphasise on risk sharing by ensuring that humanitarian workers of local actors have proper insurance coverage and are a part of evacuation plan.
- Since India doesn't have a centralised pooled funding mechanism, low-cost or no-cost crowd funding platforms should be established, which should exclusively be accessible to local actors.
- Technological innovation and integration are more required now than ever and that should primarily be the role of big agencies to complement the work of actors.
- Many local actors are facing existential crisis due to scaling down or suspension of

development programmes, therefore, donors should consider to continue supporting overhead costs, with or without programmes, so that local actors retain their core staff.

- Ensure flexibility in already approved development and humanitarian programmes to adjust them appropriately to address the challenges caused by COVID-19.
- Donors must ensure providing enough operation cost, overhead cost and unearmarked or softly earmarked funding.
- All the big actors, working in partnership with local actors, must ensure acknowledging the role of their partners on their websites, social media posts and fundraising campaigns.
- India lacks a financial data reporting platform, which is required for ensuring transparency and to monitor delivery on the Grand Bargain and Charter4Change commitments by the signatories. The humanitarian community in India should

consider establishing a dashboard for such financial reporting.

Humanitarian Aid International (HAI) is also one of the founders of global network [Alliance for Empowering Partnerships \(A4EP\)](#). Through A4EP, following papers have been published to advocate on the central role of local actors in COVID-19 response:

1. Localised response to COVID-19 global pandemic A4EP Position paper⁴
2. Reversing the inequality - opportunity knocks again or missed opportunity again⁵
3. Local Actors Matter⁶

Humanitarian needs are increasing but the resources are not. The WHS also talked about *shrinking the needs*, which hasn't happened. The humanitarian funding is inadequate and over-stretched. There is an urgent need to make efficient use of available funding while ensuring relevance of programmes, cost-efficiency and seeking durable solutions. Local actors are better positioned to do that provided they get ably complemented by international actors. ■



4 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/localised-response-covid-19-global-pandemic-a4ep-position-paper>

5 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/reversing-inequality-opportunity-knocks-again-or-missed-opportunity-again>

6 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/world-localisation-day-local-actors-matter>

The Role of Global Compact in Uniting Businesses to Tackle COVID-19

By Shabnam Siddiqui and Arya Dev,

Centre of Excellence for Governance, Ethics and Transparency (CEGET); Global Compact Network India (GCNI)

The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) is the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative and the year 2020 marks 20 years of its formation. This year also brings us an unfortunate tragedy in the form of the pandemic, which threatens to blight the green shoots of growth that UNGC has nurtured for two decades through mainstreaming a principle-based framework for business activities around the world with ten principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption. Its objective of catalysing actions in support of broader UN goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the ongoing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has also met some sustainability challenges which are magnified by COVID-19.

UNGC COVID Response: Build Back Better and Recover Stronger

The Global Compact is calling on business leaders everywhere to unite to support workers, communities and companies affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A coordinated international plan involving the business sector will be critical in efforts to support people and companies affected, limit further disruption to the economy and facilitate business continuity for a swift recovery.

Apart from encouraging businesses everywhere and making a special appeal in the spirit of solidarity and international cooperation to use the Ten Principles as their guide in responding to the crisis, the Global Compact calls for special attention to MSMEs – encouraging companies to respond with flexibility, compassion and solidarity to the impact on MSMEs and to honour current contracts to the greatest extent possible. In order for the business to navigate the crisis, UNGC has compiled a series of



COVID-19 impact briefs that detail the impact of the pandemic on a range of sustainability issue areas including gender equality, ocean, water stewardship, climate, decent work, sustainable finance, human rights and anti-corruption. Each brief includes a variety of resources to help companies build back better and recover stronger.

As the top-down approach is critical for managing any disaster, UNGC is also gathering ideas, advice and experience of CEOs from participating companies, who share their response, recovery and resilience efforts in light of COVID-19 with the global community of more than 10,000 businesses and 68 Local Networks.

The crisis has also been turned into an opportunity for knowledge transformation, upskilling and learning from global leaders from business, Government, civil society and the United Nations in the special UN Global Compact Academy series on business and COVID-19. UNGC, along with WHO and other UN agencies, has come up with a 'Business Guide on COVID-19', which calls on businesses and corporations to provide financial security to workers, provide support to the governments and focus their activities and plans on COVID response. This Guide

stresses on collective action to stem the pandemic.

SDG Ambition: Climate Action and Other Benchmarks

SDG Ambition, launched in January 2020, as an accelerator initiative that aims to challenge and support participating companies of UNGC in setting ambitious corporate targets and accelerating integration of the 17 SDGs into core business management, has been met with greater fervour in view of the pandemic. The business benchmarks set out in it, against progress lagging particularly with respect to climate change and social inequality would enable businesses to undergo an inside-out transformation. The pandemic simply reiterated the need for prompt action and has shown us how fast change could happen.

UNGC participant companies have signed a statement setting ambitious corporate emission reduction targets through the Science Based Targets initiative and its Business Ambition for 1.5°C campaign, to do their part in achieving a resilient, zero carbon economy.

As we enter the Decade of Action in 2020, the Global Compact will remain committed to overcome this crisis and reimagine, reset and redefine ambition, leadership and action to deliver the world we all want. ■

The Challenges and Opportunities for CSOs during Pandemic: The Case of Muhammadiyah

By *Rahmawati Husein*, Vice Chair, Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center, Indonesia

COVID-19 has not only affected individuals but institutions and organizations as well including Civil Society Organizations (both small and big). Muhammadiyah, the oldest and the largest CSO/FBO/NGO in Indonesia has also been severely affected by this pandemic. Muhammadiyah, which has 173 higher Institutions, 18,000 schools and 437 health facilities throughout Indonesia has suffered greatly during the pandemic. However, on the other side, Muhammadiyah has opportunities to contribute to society, as it has been stated by WHO that the religious organizations / institutions have to play a critical role in avoiding the spread of the Corona virus by helping their adherents to cope with the impact of the pandemic. Some of the challenges faced by the Muhammadiyah organization are:

1. The reduction in income

The stay-home requirement, has pushed many teachers of Muhammadiyah's School home, without any salary, as only 10% of those teachers were subsidized by government. The same is the case with hospitals, outpatients are afraid to go to hospitals causing no income for the hospital. Meanwhile, there is a big demand to use all the facilities for COVID related patients, and to support the procurement of PPE for the hospital staff particularly doctors and nurses.

2. The difficulties in getting donations from its member

Muhammadiyah is a faith-based institution, and like other faith-based organizations, it relies on the donations of its member.



Though there is still a significant contribution from its members, however, it has been less compared to other humanitarian crisis, such as natural disasters that often hit Indonesia. This is because almost all members have been affected by the pandemic, meanwhile during a natural disaster only some of the members are affected.

3. Online services are costly.

As education, faith-based gatherings, and social interaction have moved online due to lockdowns, there is a strong pressure to support students, members for congregation / sermons, as well as board member of Muhammadiyah particularly at the sub-national levels (provincial, districts, sub-district, village / neighborhood level.

Since all need online access which have bigger bandwidth, it required a costly subscription or buying data. This will influence in getting access to right information as the ability to engage digitally is reduced to access via mobile phones which is costly.

Although CSOs like Muhammadiyah are facing challenges, yet, there are also opportunities such as:

1. Increasing legitimacy and accountability

The current crisis may offer opportunities for CSOs to respond through building broader participation by a network of online volunteers and activists with strong links to the communities in which they live. Muhammadiyah as the oldest

organization, already has survived for more than 100 years, continued having opportunities to strengthen its role in providing health services and public education, campaign and awareness. As of July, Muhammadiyah has succeeded in providing PPE (personal protective equipment) such as facemask (400,893), hand sanitizer (93,600), Hazmat/Overall (76,884), food supplies (557,878 packages). In addition, Muhammadiyah disseminated information, educational campaign and awareness program through TV, Radio which channelled to various social media and has reached out to 215,861 viewers. As of July, Muhammadiyah has spent US\$12 million.

2. Attracting donors

The ability of Muhammadiyah to reach grass root level through its networks has attracted donors. Muhammadiyah has collaborated with DFAT Australia for Public education and campaign, as well as food security program. Also, with Unicef on awareness programs, and with USAID and WHO for health support of 78 Muhammadiyah hospitals that are providing services to COVID-19 patients.

3. Building new alliance

The current situation provides opportunities to engage with other types of civil society organisations. Muhammadiyah, through its unit, MDMC (Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center) has networked with Humanitarian

Forum Indonesia which is a member of Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). In addition, MDMC, along with Oxfam and Pujiono Center, is also a proponent of Seजार, a network of 34 National network CSO and 600 NGOs in Indonesia which is responding COVID-19. Its aims are not only advocating policy, but also helping other CSOs to gain knowledge, share their experience and increase capacity through online training.

The role of Muhammadiyah has been pivotal in complimenting what the government has done. Muhammadiyah has the ability to reach out to individuals which may be left behind and has the ability to provide social protection in general.

ENHANCING PREPAREDNESS

Reclaiming Space: The Important Role of Civil Society in Navigating Indonesia's 'New Normal'

By Puji Pujiono*

In Indonesia, COVID-19 risks continue to increase. As has been the case from the outbreak, challenges remain for the public in accessing transparent information about the scale of the crisis. From the outset of the crisis, civil society groups, particularly those well versed in disaster management and humanitarian response, identified the need for a more cohesive approach in order to improve outcomes for COVID-19 affected Indonesians.

From here was born the SEJAR Network (Sekretariat Jaringan-antar-Jaringan OMS-LSM in Bahasa Indonesia) – a network of networks that aims to promote the active role of civil society in the public discourse around COVID-19. SEJAR, at the Secretariat level, is a collaboration



Rapid Test LPBINU, SEJAR, Jakarta, Indonesia.

between the Pujiono Centre (supported by an ongoing partnership with Humanitarian Advisory Group), with

Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Centre (MDMC – one of the largest CSOs in the region) and Oxfam Indonesia.

SEJAJAR already has a wide-reaching footprint across Indonesia with a breadth of representatives from across civil society. 26 national CSO networks and more than 600 sub-national organisations represent 34 provinces in Indonesia. Collaboration at various levels (from provincial to national) facilitates engagement with government-led Task Forces on COVID-19. This opens up the opportunity for the CSOs at different levels to engage directly with the government official machinery. Member CSOs also engage in public discourse in the form of advocacy and debates with Senior Government officials on a wide-range of issues, including topics such as how NGOs can have better access to local government response budgets.

The Network organises a weekly web-based seminar, at the time of this writing it has been going on consecutively for 19 weeks without break, and thus critical to provide accurate and credible information with diverse topics ranging from the concerns voiced by vulnerable groups and community-based resilience. When particular issues of shared concern arise, the Network addresses them through topical and more elaborated training. Some of such issues have been NGO business continuity amidst the financial crunch, CSO coordination and networking, and emergency logistics.

Suiting to the issues at hand, SEJAJAR's sub-national networks launched their own partnership activities that help extend the reach and breadth of the network and broker new resources. For example, in Nusa Tenggara Timur, provincial SEJAJAR collaborated with the Ministry of Rural Development and the Association of Public Health Professionals to train 3,000 rural health outreach workers. SEJAJAR West Sumatra, in coordination with the provincial government and the University of Bung Hatta, held a discussion with 1,000 village leaders to address COVID-19 challenges at the grassroots level. SEJAJAR Central Java in collaboration with the Logistics Humanitarian Cluster provided basic emergency logistics to a province-wide community-based food security.

SEJAJAR is elevating the role of civil society at the regional level in transitioning and adapting to the 'New Normal'. For example, in the lead up to the 36th ASEAN Summit, SEJAJAR convened CSO networks of Southeast East Asian countries to identify common standpoints, shared narratives and strategies to influence decisions in relation to COVID-19. Bringing in civil society peak bodies from six countries together with entities such as the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) and the International

Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).

While it is still in its infancy, SEJAJAR provides an example of a network that strengthens and empowers CSOs at a time where the risk of state dominated messaging is a risk. Active engagement of civil society enables pathways for voices to be heard that otherwise risk going unheard. ■

** Dr. Puji Pujiono is a senior adviser to the Pujiono Centre and one of the principal proponents of the [SEJAJAR Network](#) of Indonesia. This article is a personal view and does not necessarily represent SEJAJAR's perspectives. He acknowledges the inputs provided by Jess Lees of the Humanitarian Advisory Group to this article.*

The Maha Bhoga Marga (MBM) Bali Foundation, which has assisted groups across Bali Island, conduct activities: Educational Caricature Competition for Junior High School-aged children with the theme of COVID-19 Prevention, whose work is used as educational material for the community; and Marketing the agricultural production of the MBM assisted groups through online media.

The Institute for Disaster Management and Climate Change of Nahdlatul Ulama (LPBI NU) conducts disinfectant spraying activities in mosques and temples, distribution of groceries to COVID-19 affected groups, and the provision of rapid test facilities.



Distribution of groceries to people affected by COVID-19, SEJAJAR, West Lombok, LPBINU, Bali.



Educational Caricature Competition of COVID-19 Prevention, SEJAJAR, MBM Foundation, Bali.



Marketing the agricultural production, SEJAJAR, MBM Foundation, Bali.

New Normal Post-COVID-19 Eco-BCP for MSME-based Livelihoods

By **Mahua Mukherjee**, Head, Centre of Excellence in Disaster Mitigation and Management (CoEDMM, IIT Roorkee), Professor, Department of Architecture & Planning, IIT Roorkee, India; UNDRR -APSTAAG Board Member

A manufacturing and service enterprise is classified as a **micro, small or medium enterprise (MSME)** based on the investment up to 50 crore INR in plant and machinery or equipment and annual turnover of 250 crore INR. The immediate Post-COVID19 concern is to get back migrant, contract and daily-wagers to production. For revival of MSMEs essentially means a 'Business Continuity Planning' (BCP) to be in place to manage the four pillars (4Ps) to continue to operate during disruptions. As MSME sector is a major contributor to emissions and effluents, the BCP needs to address

the urgent concern on greener life-cycle, especially waste management process for manufacturing units, and to integrate safe industrial standards for affluent and emission.

The 4Ps (ILO) stands for **People** (safety and security), **Process** (internal organisational processes, supply chain, logistical planning), **Profit** (risk management to products/ services) and **Partnerships**. Any new normal BCP shall bring out a balanced recovery plan so that economy and environment can get their due importance. Without handholding

from governance, socio-political, corporate and engineering enterprises, it will be too much to expect the MSMEs can prevent escalation of pollution and emissions and irreparable loss to natural resources like soil, water and air (Rathi, 2020). Innovative thoughts on green job alternative creations, e-marketing linkage, CSR support and other mechanisms would go a long way.

Table 1.0 concludes with suggested guidelines for 4 Ps of ten Essential Targets for the Ecosystem-centric Business Continuity Plan (Eco-BCP) (Mukherjee et al. 2020). ■

Table: 1.0 Ten Essential Targets for the Eco-BCP

Target	Action Plan
PEOPLE	
Target 1. Preparation of business priority with new learning from new risks, social safety and digital literacy	1. Understanding importance of risk perception and communication 2. Reopening adhering to new learning on safe health and wellbeing 3. Improved workspace ventilation and illumination to minimise aggravation of respiratory illness and energy-utilisation 4. Facilitation to digital literacy and work-from-home
Target 2. Reskilling on environmental norms/ Industrial safety and training for employee awareness on sustainability	5. Awareness about industry-specific environmental safety norms for outfit, equipment and machinery; priority online training, drills across levels 6. Cross-training and reskilling aligned with enterprises' improved/ alternate business plan to provide redundancy and resilience 7. Policy-level changes for Ecosystem-centric BCP while prioritising reopening, affordable access to facilities, loans and insurances
PROCESS	
Target 3. Cluster formation based on spatial proximity or nature of pollution generation	8. Cluster formation based on spatial proximity and nature of pollution generating business, to strengthen capacity for Eco-BCPs 9. Mainstreaming handholding from government, business/ industrial associations, corporate and engineering enterprises community for MSMEs opting for Eco-BCP
Target 4. Introducing process mapping for produce and waste, target setting for a reduction in waste	10. Precise Process Mapping with activity and socio-economic and environmental value propositions with Inputs (natural and human resources, raw materials, capital), Energy required, Outputs (products/ services), and Waste (effluent, emissions). 11. Business Impact Analysis, to strategies legal and regulatory practices, brand image, public and occupational health. 12. Reopening with optimised production conforming to health/ environmental norms and compensation to lost production time.
Target 5. Integration and mapping of new/ improved processes	13. Exploring job/ business change-over, including green jobs like emission and effluent treatment, ecosystem restoration/reforestation. 14. Contingency strategy for weakened supply chain to include other 3Ps (People, Facility, Technology) to lower burden on environment/ finance

Target	Action Plan
	15. Redesigned recovery priorities need risk assessment to protect core products and services.
FACILITY	
Target 6. Incentives and access to additional loan integrated with the Eco-BCP package	16. Micro-financing options for risk pooling and create insurance. 17. Risk Incentive for frontline workforce 18. Mandatory company registration 19. Stakeholders' support towards employee training/ reskilling, supply chain inclusion, business opportunity extension, e-marketing
Target 7. Effluent and emission treatment and graduated monitoring facility at individual MSME and Cluster level	20. technical and financial support to initiate graduated plan for effluent and emission treatment 21. Evaluation of Eco-BCP for adherence to local and national governments' safety and mitigation guidelines 22. MSMEs' active participation at creating and operationalising Blue-green Infrastructure (BGI) network. 23. Corporates shall mandatorily re-evaluate environmental compliance
Target 8. 3 rd party certification for SI	24. Third-party Sustainable Index (SI) verification/ certification to boost enterprises' image and employee-confidence
TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATIONS	
Target 9. Collaboration for circular economy, austerity measures and productive technologies to enable baseline resilience	25. Ensuring collaboration, data access and productive technologies to enable employees remote work experience 26. Sustainable Industrial infrastructure like eco-industrial park, BGI, community communication and circular economy in Eco-BCP. 27. Avoidance to ecologically sensitive zones, increasing shared facilities within and across clusters, working space
Target 10. Innovations in effluent and emission management in the reduce-reuse-recycle triad, environmental pricing	28. Continuous value addition through innovations for cost-effective environment-friendly effluent and emission treatment design and implementation. 29. Acknowledging innovations coming from MSMEs' workforce to incentivise/ motivate employee, ideas protection, compensatory honourarium.

(Based on Mukherjee et al. 2020)

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DRR DURING PANDEMIC

International Webinar Discusses on Addressing Multi-hazard Risks in Context of COVID-19

By National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET), Nepal

International Webinar: Addressing Multi-hazard Risk in context of COVID-19: A Global Perspective held on June 22, 2020 has offered recommendations for working in DRR to address multiple hazards while responding to COVID-19. The Webinar hosted by National Society for Earthquake

Technology-Nepal (NSET) on the occasion of 27th NSET Day, brought together a panel of prominent speakers from various countries with different backgrounds related to disaster risk reduction, and discussed how the current COVID-19 experiences impact the future planning of DRR sector.

The speakers stressed on the need of 'Localization' and 'Proactive Response' in the COVID-19 situation and realization of importance of 'Localization' has been more than ever before. They also focused on the requirement of adjustments on Sphere Standards. Also priority was given for enhancing risk

communication and awareness raising. There is a need for preparedness and effective response as the evidence shows communities who were better prepared could better respond during the Amphan Cyclone.

The continuum of health services is a challenging but an important sector. The Speakers emphasized on the need of more research works focusing on multi hazard response including social aspects, and while doing so should leave no one behind and reach to the people at the last mile. We should strengthen and support local actions, and also continue learning from around the world, they said.

As a Keynote speaker, **Dr. Manu Gupta**, Co-Founder, SEEDS, India and Executive Member ADRRN talked on 'How to deal with Multi hazards in COVID-19 situations, and role of Government and Civil Society Organizations for new normal?' Another Keynote Speaker **Mr. Kendra Hirata**, Director of Programs, CITYNET Yokohama, Japan talked on 'How cities can get better prepared for pandemic like COVID-19 in conjunction with threats of Multi hazards?'

There were speakers who shared experiences from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.

Mr. Sanat K. Bhowmik, Deputy Executive Director of COAST Trust shared 'Experience from Bangladesh to respond to Cyclone Amphan in times of COVID-19'. Dr. Farhan Khalid, Registrar and Team Leader of Rescue 1122/ Punjab Emergency Service (PES) shared on 'Responding to COVID-19 by Rescue 1122 in Pakistan: Lessons learned and challenges.' Mr. Surya Narayan Shrestha, Executive Director of NSET shared the 'Experiences from Nepal to respond to COVID-19'.

In the Webinar, noted academicians as well as DRR professionals and practitioners also shared their reflections and experiences on dealing with multi-hazards combined with COVID-19.

Professor Alexander Densmore from Durham University, UK talked on a new project 'Risks from the Mountain Hazard Chain: Research in the wake of the Pandemic'. Prof. Cui Peng from Chinese Academy of Sciences gave his perspectives based on experience of China to contain COVID-19.

Dr. Amod Mani Dixit, Chairperson of ADRRN and General Secretary of NSET talked on Asian CSOs engagements on handling COVID-19 situations. Mr. Loy Rego from MARS Practitioners Network, India spoke

on "What NSET should consider in light of COVID-19?"

The Webinar was moderated by Dr. Ramesh Guragain, Deputy Executive Director of NSET. A total of 178 participants from different sectors such as academia, CSOs, UN agency, National and International agencies working on DRR, Professional Society, Emergency response forces, journalist, Students, from various parts of the globe joined the talk.

The question and answer session was very interactive with high participation and discussion between speakers and attendees. The major focus was on the changes in the volunteer response, change in standards due to COVID-19, Business continuity Plan (BCP), suggestion for Nepalese farmers, usefulness of Emergency response trainings, CSOs role in COVID-19, importance of community preparedness, involving health component in DRR, Government's role in responding COVID-19 in Nepal etc. At the end, Mr. Surya Narayan Shrestha from NSET synthesized the proceedings of webinar.

The brief report of Webinar proceedings is available [here](#). ■

Glimpse of Webinar:



Biodiversity Linked Pandemic Response: Action for National Initiatives

By Akanksha Khatri, Head of Nature Action Agenda, World Economic Forum, Switzerland

Nature is declining at an unprecedented rate, with nearly 1 million species at risk of extinction because of human activity. Scientists have warned that the Amazon rainforest, the world's coral reefs and the boreal forest biomes are all fast approaching the cusp of irreversible tipping points with far-reaching effects on the economy, society and life as we know it. The consequences are just as alarming for business and humanity as they are for the environment.

COVID-19 is a stark reminder of how ignoring biophysical risks can have catastrophic health and economic impacts at the global scale. Climate change is currently responsible for between 11% and 16% of biodiversity loss. Fighting climate change is essential but not enough to address the nature crisis – a fundamental transformation is needed across three socio-economic systems: food, land and ocean use; infrastructure and the built environment; and energy and extractives.

Together, the threats emerging from these three systems endanger around 80% of the threatened or near-threatened species. They are responsible for the most significant business-related pressures to biodiversity and the systems with the largest opportunity to lead in co-creating nature-positive pathways.

There are wins for business and nature if we start to change our ways. By implementing nature-positive solutions, or solutions that add value back into nature, we could create 395 million jobs and \$10.1 trillion in business opportunity by 2030. Businesses can take practical actions to turn these opportunities into reality by working with governments and civil society to set

the agenda, push the transitions forward and accelerate policy reforms.

We can address the looming biodiversity crisis and reset the economy in a way that creates and protects millions of jobs. Smart farming utilizing sensors and satellite imagery in Indonesia improved crop yields on average by 60%. Suzhou Industrial Park's green development in China has seen its GDP increase 260-fold partially through green development. In Viet Nam, people living in coastal communities saw their incomes more than double following the restoration of critical mangroves.

There are a few ways we can move towards these transitions across each of the three areas.

Food, land and ocean use: What we eat and grow makes up around \$10 trillion of global GDP and employs up to 40% of the global workforce. Nature-positive solutions can create 191 million new jobs and \$3.6 trillion of additional revenue or cost savings by 2030. Over 4.3 million jobs and \$195 billion in business opportunities can come from precision-agriculture technologies by 2030. With 40% improvements in yields expected, investments could yield returns of over 10%. This is limited not only to food consumption but also in textiles and fashion. The equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is landfilled or burned every second, meaning \$500 billion is lost every year as a result of discarded clothing. Using more renewable inputs and reusing, refurbishing and recycling clothes could lead to \$130 billion in savings and prevent 148 million tonnes of textile waste by 2030.

Infrastructure and the built-environment: About 40% of global GDP comes from the environment we build – office buildings, homes and transport. Nature-positive solutions can create 117 million new jobs and \$3 trillion in additional revenue or cost savings by 2030. Reducing municipal water leakage could save \$115 billion by 2030. Return on investments in water efficiency can be above 20%.

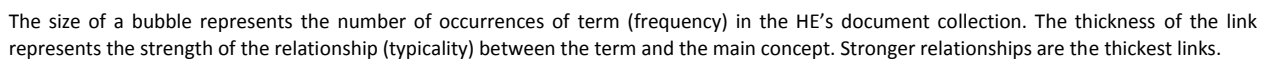
Energy and extractives: The energy we produce and what we extract accounts for almost a quarter of global GDP and 16% of global employment. With energy demand growing, there is an opportunity to create 87 million jobs and \$3.5 trillion in business opportunities by 2030. Here are some

examples: Opportunities of \$650 billion and investment returns greater than 10% are expected from renewable energy sources by 2030. Stimulus packages for solar and other commercialized renewables can generate millions of new jobs. Solar energy without subsidies matched fossil fuel costs in over 30 countries and were projected to be cheaper than coal in China and India by 2021. Land for renewable energy projects are three to 12 times the size of coal-powered ones. Some companies are developing high-rise photovoltaic power stations that can be combined with animal husbandry and ecotourism providing additional revenue streams on the same land plot.

Public calls are getting louder for businesses and government to do better. We can protect our food supplies, make better use of our infrastructure and tap into new energy sources by transitioning to nature-positive solutions. ■

Word Sketch

■ Main concept
 ■ Concepts related to EPIDEMIC
 ■ Types of EPIDEMIC
 ■ Usages of EPIDEMIC



All corners of our globalised world have felt the extensive impacts of COVID-19. Not only has COVID-19 generated new crises and needs for humanitarian assistance, but lockdowns and restrictions have also complicated ongoing humanitarian responses to existing crises. The far-reaching nature of this pandemic across

Identifying Concepts to Inform the COVID-19 Response

Information responses to COVID-19 have mostly involved humanitarian and public health actors and researchers creating and consolidating knowledge, operational guidance and lessons from the field in online portals.⁷ To complement these efforts, the Humanitarian Encyclopedia project

platform to share guidance and field experiences on adapting to COVID-19.

saw an opportunity to help diverse actors involved in COVID-19 response to speak a mutually understood language by disseminating analysis on key concepts.

In conjunction with public health and linguistic experts, we selected 17 COVID-19 priority concepts out of the Humanitarian Encyclopedia's list of 129 concepts. These were: *care, communication, community engagement, crisis, emergency, epidemic, ethics, livelihood, monitoring, prevention, risk, sanitation, solidarity, contingency planning, evidence, psychosocial support, vulnerability*. This selection of concepts reflected a range of emerging challenges to the initial COVID-19 response in early 2020, such as the "ethics" of lockdowns, quarantines and isolation, the importance of social "solidarity", and the need for "community engagement" to support and protect the vulnerable populations.

Exploring Conceptual Relations and Breakdowns

The 17 concepts were analysed following the general methodology applied for all of the Humanitarian Encyclopedia's concept exploration summaries. This approach involves analysing occurrences of the concept

in over 2,500 documents published by humanitarian organisations between 2005 and 2018.⁸ Identifying how the concept behaves in this document collection provides an indication of how humanitarian actors have tended to use each concept prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a baseline reference to see if and how the use of the concept is changing in this crisis.⁹

In particular, we explored the frequency with which each concept appears in relation to other terms, as a modifier of other terms, and as an object of other terms, to sketch the main related concepts, types of usage and technical terms. These sketches show, for example, that "epidemic" is commonly used in combination with "pandemic" and "outbreak", as well as with "emergency" and "disaster"; that the specific disaster events associated with epidemics include floods, earthquakes, famine and malnutrition; and that the top three types of epidemic found in the document collection are cholera, Ebola, and HIV/AIDS. Such findings are not conclusive, but open important questions for further study. For example, can the low frequency of occurrences in humanitarian documents for respiratory related epidemics (such

as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)) compared to cholera, Ebola or HIV/AIDS explain a lack of preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic?

We also disaggregated the frequency of occurrences in the corpus for each concept by organisation type, region, and year, and found, for example, that information projects and think tank types of organisations use these 17 COVID-19 related concepts more frequently than states, religious entities and foundations. A next phase of analysis will use more advanced linguistic methods and humanitarian expertise to investigate why such variations might occur and the controversies related to each concept in more detail.

Co-creating a Public Good

The Humanitarian Encyclopedia presents an innovative platform to bring diverse researchers and humanitarian actors together to share their understandings and enrich the meaning of concepts that are often assumed to be universal.

If you are interested in one of the 129 concepts and want to help us co-create knowledge for this global public good, please join us.¹⁰ ■

ORGANIZATIONAL CASE STUDY

The Role of Arab Water Council amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

By *Heba Al Hariry*, Deputy Technical Director, Technical and Cooperation Development Department, Arab Water Council - AWC, Egypt

At the time the world is mobilizing to defeat the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it has never been more important to protect our water resources. In these unprecedented times and in the middle of this global

crisis, no one can argue that water is at the first line of defense, acting as a barrier to the virus, and as an essential tool for recovery by maintaining a decent standard of living for millions of people who are confined to their homes. On the other

hand, sewerage monitoring as well has recently emerged as an effective tool that can be reliably used for early detection of affected communities which emphasizes again the importance of achieving the Sustainable Development Goal

⁸ For more information on the methodology, see: <https://humanitarianencyclopedia.org/concept-analysis/>

⁹ For more exploratory analysis of COVID-19 priority concepts, see: <https://humanitarianencyclopedia.org/covid-19-priority-concepts/>

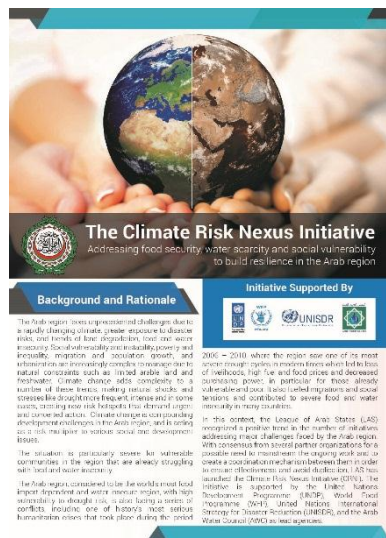
¹⁰ To express your interest in a concept, see: <https://humanitarianencyclopedia.org/concepts-alphabetical-list/>

for Water and Sanitation for all (Goal 6).

While human health and life are the primary and immediate concerns to address, water and environmental systems from local to regional are considered crucial for overcoming the pandemic, protecting the health of communities and for maintaining the economic development and human progress in our societies. Therefore, this enormous unintended experiment, offers opportunities for extraordinary insights that could help us build back better and rise back stronger, if we retained our focus on addressing the root causes of this crisis and maintained our recovery pathways through sensible policies and practices.

From this perspective and emerging from its regional role in enhancing water and food security and advancing climate action in the MENA region, The Arab Water Council (AWC) has been relentlessly leading regional efforts with development partners and relevant stakeholders towards achieving and maintaining sustainable water and sanitation for all, in an attempt to enhance the resilience of vulnerable affected communities and fragile groups to meet this crisis and help to ensure that the SDG agenda is realized.

Part of these regional efforts is the work undertaken under the framework of the *Climate Risk Nexus Initiative (CRNI)* -lead by the Sustainable Development Committee in the League of Arab States (LAS) - towards achieving greater policy coherence across goals of climate change, disaster risk reduction, food and water security and social vulnerability. Under this initiative, AWC has been taking leading roles



in developing capacities of regional and local partners to address existing gaps in knowledge and information aiming at achieving more risk-informed developments and towards identifying integrated solutions that link water, food and energy sectors with climate action as well as with crisis and recovery goals.

On another aspect, and aiming at prioritizing water allocated budgets, AWC has been also contributing to the adaptation of climate smart solutions in agriculture by advocating on the importance of using advanced technologies for sustainable agriculture water management and for improving water productivity and efficiency in irrigation. Additionally, AWC has been advocating on the importance of enhancing investments in Non-Conservational water resources projects and on its great potential in addressing the current shortfalls in water supply by developing policy briefs and by the continuous regular monitoring of MENA water resources through the “The state of Arab Water Report” in a way to tackle the growing gap between poor water access in rural areas and better

access in urban areas and towards achieving greater levels of water security and sustainable water usage, despite resource scarcity.

Finally, amid these exceptional times, it is increasingly important to keep vulnerable communities and populations in mind particularly poor women, migrants, IDPs who often live in overcrowded areas that are disaster-prone, lacking access to basic necessities, sustainable income, and with little or no social protection. In this regard, AWC has been working closely with relevant stakeholders and with the support of international Programmes, organizations and partnerships on developing gender response indicators and in bridging the gap in gender disaggregated data and information particularly for disaster prevention and risk reduction and in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies to achieve inclusive sustainable development goals.

With these efforts and more, the Arab Water Council will continue to work towards an Arab collective role that raises the level of awareness about existing challenges, intensifies the current efforts to confront them and contributes to the development of the region. It is also high time for the scientific communities and as well as for our political leaders to realize the importance of real partnerships in crisis and risk management and to start acting now towards creating effective partnerships that aim at harnessing cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder cooperation and collective approaches across international, regional and national actors towards strengthening integrated solutions and tangible implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Region. ■

COVID-19 and Sustainable Mobility: Five Areas for Policy Action in South Asia

By Holger Dalkmann, CEO and Founder at Sustain 2030, Germany

Transport is at the heart of the pandemic. Freight restrictions affected access to food and concerns about infection via public transport impacted people's ability to travel and commute safely. On the other hand, reduced vehicle use during lockdowns brought benefits - better air quality, fewer accidents and lower Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.

Most of the countries in Asia have now eased their restrictions and trip numbers are almost back to pre-pandemic level. But there are significant changes - more walking, cycling and car use and less use of public transport.

This shift brings big challenges as well as opportunities for transforming the transport sector. Every year in Asia there are more than two million premature deaths from outdoor air pollution and more than half a million road fatalities, mostly among the poorer parts of society. This is coupled with growing GHG emissions, pushing reduction targets out of reach. While transport systems are necessary for economic growth, the current system is not sustainable.

The future of mobility in Asian countries is at a crossroads. We could see either:

- A continued increase in individual motorization and a reduction in public transport use leading to increased levels of congestion and the associated negative impacts from transport; or
- A transition towards a more accessible, cleaner, affordable, and efficient transport system based on safe infrastructure for walking and cycling, a better public transport service and a transition towards cleaner electric vehicles.

So, how do we grasp the opportunity to create the better scenario?

Here are five recommendations for policy actions to improve the sustainability of mobility. They are based on a [policy paper by the High Volume Transport Program](#), a research and knowledge program for LICs funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

1) At the NATIONAL level - Strengthen national climate plans

Countries must submit their climate plan known as Nationally Determined Contributions for the next five years by the end of 2020 in order to fulfil their commitment to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Innovative investment mechanisms for electrification of the formal and informal public transport fleet would both enhance the climate plans and support economic recovery. Although electrification, particularly for larger fleets like three wheelers, minibuses and public transport, requires larger scale up front investment, there is long-term climate and economic benefits.

2) At the REGIONAL level Integrate decision making between government and operators

In many countries there are a wide range of institutions involved in the planning, operation, and maintenance of the transport system, which makes it challenging to create a common vision. The pandemic has shown that it can take a long time to develop common messages on the hygienic rules, create new policies for transport operations and implement them. A reduction in the number of national ministries

responsible for transport as well as a long-term vision towards an integrated transport authority on the city or metropolitan level would improve and speed up decision-making.

3) At the URBAN level - Revisit policy and funding support for urban mobility

While the pandemic might stimulate further suburbanisation, partially enabled through telework, well connected cities provide access to goods and services for all. Cities rely on public transport because it uses the least road space. Most of the public transport systems in Asia rely on a fare-based revenue model of some kind so revenue loss is significant. This model is not sustainable and does not allow larger scale investments to improve the system as a whole. A reform towards a state funded system with associated institutional and financial frameworks for private operators could herald a cleaner and better integrated public transport system.

4) At the LOCAL level - Build upon walking and cycling initiatives

Walking and cycling was identified by the World Health Organisation as the healthiest and safest mode of transport during the pandemic. However, many countries lack the necessary space and infrastructure. Many cities, particular in Europe, the US and Latin America, as well as some Asian cities like Bangalore, reacted quickly and created "pop-up bike lanes" through temporary reallocation of road spaces. Many of these bike lanes were already being considered as part of a wider future cycling strategy and they were used to test the impact of such a change. This experiment should be harnessed to scale the role of safe walking and cycling.

5) At the DIGITAL level - Invest in digital infrastructure

The pandemic has shown how vital the digital infrastructure is to enable business to continue to operate. In Asia up to 50% of the work force was able to work from home, a pattern which could continue post pandemic. This

would reduce the need to travel as well as saving workspace and overhead costs for businesses. Cashless transactions through smart ticketing for ride share services, taxis and public transport increased efficiency and reduced direct contact. The education and health sectors could also benefit

from better digital infrastructure reducing the pressure on the transport system.

Asian society is at a crossroads. Governments and business now have the opportunity to build back better and create a more sustainable transport system for the future. ■

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