

A Special Article on: The Global South and COVID-19 Crisis

How Global South is coordinating against Covid-19: What the North can learn



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This pandemic stands to be a testimony of solidarity among the people of the Global South, who can show the way to all, that regardless of all the shortcomings in their economies and infrastructure, the Global South can still stand together and face the issues thrown towards it, when it matters the most.

Introduction

By the time of writing this article, Coronavirus or COVID-19, as termed by WHO, had reached more than 177 countries and affected more than three hundred thousand people resulting in more than thirteen thousand deaths (worldometers, 2020). According to WHO, COVID-19 is an infectious disease, caused by a newly discovered coronavirus, creating mild to moderate respiratory illness and even developing into serious illness for those having co-morbid conditions such as Cardiovascular diseases, Diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases and Cancer (WHO, 2020). The extent of the pandemic (the now accepted term for the global epidemic) is yet to be seen as it is just starting to gain traction in many countries of the Global South. Many experts believe, that due to people returning from the countries of the Global North and with the countries of Global South going into lockdown, the numbers would certainly go up.

According to BBC, China first reported cases of “mysterious SARS-like

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pneumonia” to the WHO on December 31 (Cheung, 2020). Since then, the virus spread from East Asian countries like South Korea and Hong Kong, South East Asia, West Asia and reached Europe in less than a month. Outside of mainland China and South Korea, European countries like Italy and China’s trading partners like Iran

Responses to the Pandemic

The virus landed in Latin America on February 26, when Brazil confirmed a case in Sao Paulo (AS/COA, 2020). Since then, although the response of governments has been varied, the countries have started working on a regional plan to combat the epidemic. Similar is the case across African nations which are responding to the pandemic aggressively, learning from the experience the continent underwent during the Ebola outbreak in 2014/15. The governments are taking proactive actions to manage the containment and with fewer than thousand cases, lockdowns have already begun (Beaubien, 2020). The most applaudable effort in cooperation during these times have come from South Asia. Member states convened a video conference of SAARC leaders, discussed the setting up an Emergency Fund and brainstormed over the possibilities of how South Asia can insulate internal trade and local value chains. The video conference

are bearing the heaviest brunt of the pandemic. Worldwide, countries are enforcing curfews on social gatherings, markets, public transportation, and deploying screening procedures to quarantine large sections of their population.

gains even more importance given the fact that the grouping has been in a deadlock over the past four years, due to issues between members. Leading by example, the Indian Prime Minister not only invited the leaders from Afghanistan, Bhutan,

Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives, but also pledged \$10 million towards the Emergency Fund, with immediate effect, and to put together a rapid response team of doctors and specialists. It was also agreed that a SAARC Pandemic Protocol could be drawn up to cope with such situations and technology as well as training should be an underlying feature going forward for cooperation (Chaudhary,2020).

It is hard to ignore that most of the nations of Global South, already reeling under several crises like economic slowdown, inflation,

Unemployment, climate change and mass migration, will face much worse effects of

this pandemic, than what is witnessed in the Global North. Also, highlighting the reality that the Global South nations depend in one way or another, on developed nations for aids, trade and grants, the pandemic will surely expose the true nature of North's intentions towards South's problems. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 will put the Global North on notice, if the poor and the developing world can coordinate and cooperate well during these times, further strengthening the bonds of South-South cooperation.

World Bank has announced the first package of \$12 billion, added by the International Monetary Fund's announcement of \$50 billion in emergency fund for the low and middle-income countries. However, as mentioned by Social Watch, several countries that have reached their debt sustainability limit, would need grants rather than loans, and those countries whose debt are classified as 'unsustainable' and are currently excluded from any support from the perspective of IMF, will also need aid, exigently (SOCIAL WATCH, 2020). This surely will be testing times for regional multilateral financing mechanisms, where sustainable development as the main agenda also includes medical infrastructure and intervention. Further, the regional financing framework, that the Global

South nations have established in the last couple of decades, stands to prove its mettle now, as the negative consequences on the economy will also need to be tackled.

Southern Solidarity

At the same time, sitting on comfortable cushions of their developed economies, the Global North has been caught napping. Western nations like the US and the EU were unable to check the transmission in its early phase, despite boasting world class infrastructure and social security net and are now increasingly turning towards isolationist policies. This can be exemplified by taking into consideration the case of Iran, reeling under the pandemic as an epicenter and forced to reach the IMF doors for emergency loan for the first time in sixty years, yet bearing the brunt of sanctions by the US, limiting its ability to gather urgently needed medical equipment and humanitarian goods (ECFR, 2020). Here too, the path has been shown by regional cooperation, where the Gulf Cooperation Council nations like Qatar, UAE and Kuwait have expressed solidarity and facilitated flights, medical supplies and healthcare aid.

Taking into consideration that several parts of the Global South like Latin America and

South Asia are some of the most unequal regions in the world in terms of economic capabilities, the responses generated towards containing the pandemic will be specifically difficult for these nations to implement. Added to this is the fear among all the poor and emerging economies, that it may become too late for containing the transmission of the virus considering lack of screening and quarantining facilities, despite WHO efforts. The cases that have come to light are expected to rise in the coming days as more people get tested, who may already be having the symptoms but are out of the ambit of present testing and healthcare facilities. However, without a doubt, this pandemic will take efforts and coordination from the Global South, in times where the Global North seems to be running to save its own interests.

The initiatives by the Latin American, South Asian, Gulf and African nations towards cooperation and coordination will be closely observed by the world and holds the potential for changing the world's perspective towards the Global South. This pandemic stands to be a testimony of solidarity among the people of the Global South, who can show the way to all, that regardless of all the shortcomings in their economies and infrastructure, the Global South can still stand together and face the

issues thrown towards it, when it matters the most.

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