



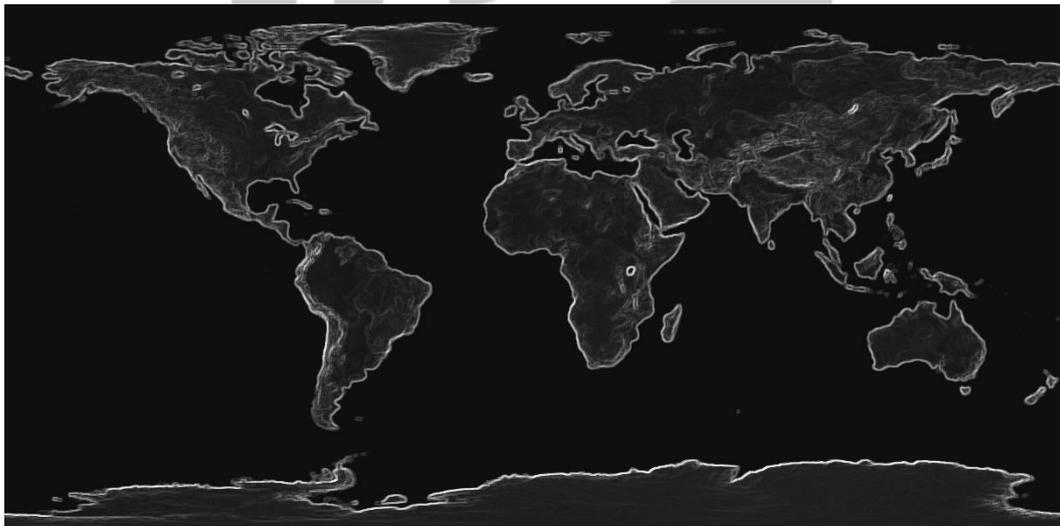
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# **A COLLECTIVIST STRATEGY TO THE COVID CRISIS**

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*Global coordination for development of multiple-sectoral policy interventions to combat Coronavirus.*

*Veritas et Aequitas*



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## **A Collectivist Strategy to the COVID Crisis**

Global coordination for development of multiple-sectoral policy interventions to combat Coronavirus.



Borders have begun to open up, social distancing is being preached, and individualistic attempts for human survival are ventured into, the necessity of a coordinated global response is lost into the oblivion. The world would face the deadly implications arising due to multiple uncoordinated individualistic responses and absence of a global one not today, but in the years to come.

As acts of accusal in the theater of post truth politics are played to maintain a grip on power by democratic means or otherwise, the aftermath of this crisis plunges the world into an abyss of darkness and failure. One for all and all for one has been the cornerstone of human progress



both globally and regionally for centuries. This is not the first time our world has faced a crisis with such far reaching consequences, but as we ascend the ladder of human progress the damage resulting from a fall this high is heightened as well.

*In the words of the United Nations Secretary General, “We are as strong as the weakest health systems in the world.”*

### **Coordinated global response explained**

Coronavirus, the most contagious pandemic of our time needs to be inhibited and defeated at the global level across all the countries. This will be instrumental in preventing a return of the disease in civilizations that may have achieved success in defeating the virus before the others during the recovery phase for the world. It is necessary that special care is imparted to containment and further prevention of disease in regions of the world with the weakest health systems and the ones battling additional humanitarian problems.

In the complex nexus of supply chains that connect our globalized world, absence of a coordinated global response would result in detrimental consequences to international security and trade, and by extension the global development. While addressing this crisis it is necessary that the response includes public health, political, economic, social and humanitarian perspectives and policy interventions, both to solve the crisis, and help in recovery from it.

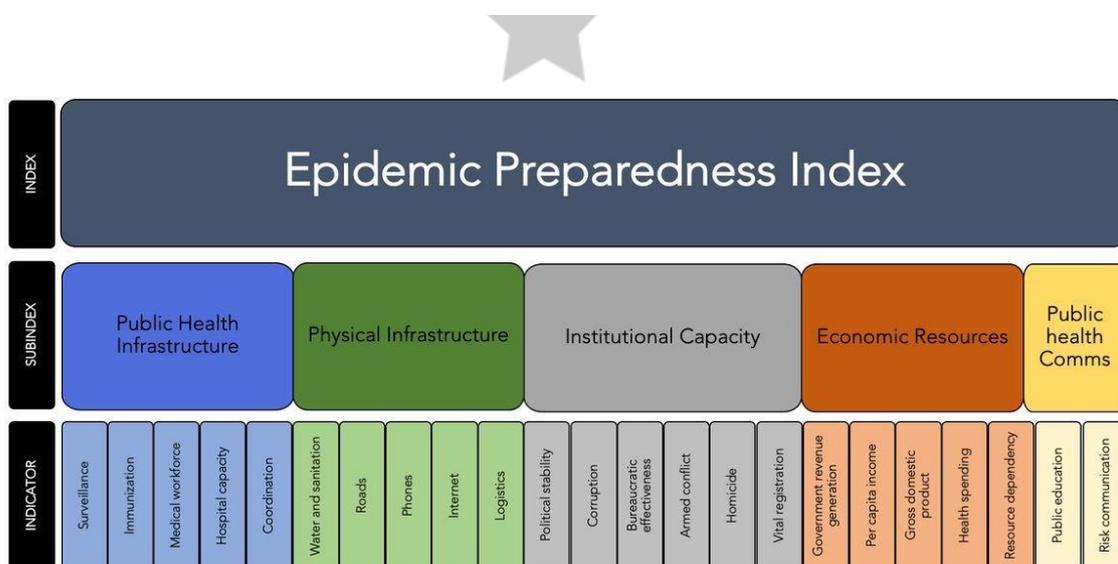
Coordinated Global Response must incorporate world governments, institutions, civil societies, international organizations and above all the people. This response requires pooling of resources from all the aforementioned entities. This pooling would result in the development of capability to design and employ multisectoral policy interventions. This would bring together variety of solutions through people and organizations from different sectors working together. As a result, this response plan will be globally coordinated and cooperated, while being multi-pronged and multisectoral in nature. The learnings from previous crisis, medical or not, will be shared and help us form better protocols and solutions to pre-empt global threats in the future.

Along with financial aid, grants, and loans for financial recovery of countries, the response should also include the governments and international organisations addressing issues such as late warnings of disease outbreaks, sluggish flow of medical essentials, along with economic, political, social and security threats arising due to the rapid spread of the disease. This response should also aim to tackle marginalization, stigma and discrimination against the people.



## Failure of learnings from the H1N1 crisis

Dr. Ben Oppenheim’s research on development and application of an Epidemic Preparedness Index (EPI) for testing the national preparedness against epidemics was published in the BMJ Global Health Journal. The EPI is global, covering 188 countries. It consists of five subindices measuring each country’s economic resources, public health communications, infrastructure, public health systems and institutional capacity. Having tested the efficiency of this construct with proxy measures for preparedness and response capacity, including the timeliness of outbreak detection and reporting, as well as vaccination rates during the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, the results indicated that European and North American countries were most prepared for an epidemic outbreak.



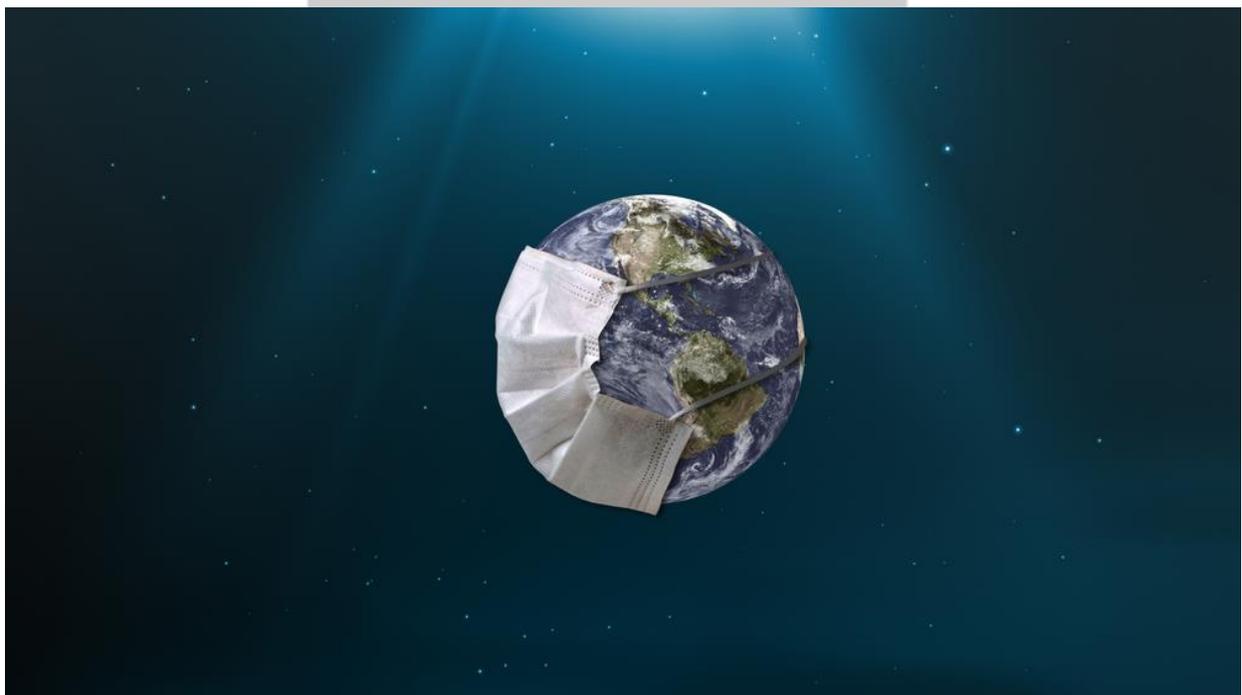
Dr. Ben Oppenheim and his colleagues developed an index that spreads across multiple sectors to test the national preparedness by governments against epidemics

However, this was not the case with respect to the COVID crisis, where these nations were the ones that were hit the worst. One of the primary factors for the failure of the past learnings from 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic was the lack of political will, and multi-industry coordination at the beginning of the outbreak. The lack of political will, and multi-sector, industry coordination resulted in late closure of urban centres by imposition of a lockdown. At the same time, the lack of coordination domestically and globally severely hampered the capacity of hospitals, and medical centres to treat the COVID patients. These parameters need to be taken into consideration for determining the national preparedness, and legislations need to be brought in which would make sure that countries are prepared for such outbreaks in the future.



Individualistic responses, which were the popular go to solution for populist leaders results in the lack coordination between countries. These responses are equivalent to putting off fire in one room of the house at a time without any information about the condition of fire in the other rooms. Countries can no longer afford to be collectivist only in the economic sense while letting individualism take a hold in social, public health, education and security sense against this pandemic, and its recovery strategy.

Our learnings from past pandemics and epidemics show that a global killer like this requires genuine political acknowledgement, strong commitment, and humble cooperation both domestically and internationally. These steps can be deliberated and agreed upon at multilateral and partnership forums of the world. Multiple alliances, organizations, agencies and bodies have been attempting to build consensus for solving this problem. Yet, these efforts have failed to establish robust solutions until this point. As we move into the recovery phase from the pandemic while battling to keep the outbreak in check, this political acknowledgement and coordination is more important than ever before.



### **The containment, treatment and recovery strategy**

The key aspects of a coordinated global response against Coronavirus are — containment, treatment, and recovery. These aspects apply to both people and governments, the people are expected to practice active social distancing to contain the disease, pursue testing and treatment



against the disease while aiming to recover fully, and in a similar manner, the governments must focus on these aspects by adopting collectivism and shunning the individualistic school of thought.

The global containment strategy for the government entails a solid commitment to transparent sharing of information across sovereign borders, capacity building support against the pandemic, and multi-industry and multi-sectoral cooperation between countries in these times of crisis. Varied geography and demographics may result in the virus behaving differently in different regions of the world. Thus, ignoring a region means losing an opportunity to gain more information about the virus. People in countries with weak health systems are the most vulnerable to contraction of the virus and could greatly contribute to its rapid spread. It is necessary to enhance WHO's channel for information sharing about the disease and means to contain it. This information would help the other governments create infrastructure, protocols, citizen warnings and systems for efficient dissemination of information about the disease spread, its morbidity, mortality and lessons to protect their citizens. This plays a major role in the containment strategy.

Treatment phase for the governments includes focusing on public health while ensuring that people's livelihoods are not lost. Most developing and under developed countries in the world lack any form of Universal Health Coverage, let alone more advanced social security schemes such as Universal Basic Income. Weak social security leaves the Below Poverty Line (BPL) and middle-class population most vulnerable to Coronavirus. Protecting their livelihoods such that they are able to feed themselves and their families, afford testing, treatment and recovery from the virus is a part of the Treatment strategy for the governments. Multi-sectoral coordination domestically, and internationally is extremely important for the same. Industries such as automotive, textiles, hospitality, and tourism remain shut due to lack of demand, but can be revived to produce material, equipment, and logistics that would help the nation battle the Coronavirus. Sharing of learnings and resources across different industries will make sure a supply of important supplies is maintained, while people do not lose their livelihoods.



India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announcing India's Atmanirbhar Campaign for self sufficiency and development

Testing for Coronavirus is unaffordable to the poorest until some form of Universal Health Coverage is provided by their government. The countries which lack this, need to quickly coordinate with the other countries to acquire or manufacture these testing kits in their own country. This also extends to treatment of people affected with Coronavirus. One of the few proven treatments, including but not limited to Hydroxychloroquine need to be made readily available in the hospitals and health centers treating the patients. Diverting a portion of the funds to subsidize the raw material, manufacturing costs and distribution costs of the testing kits would go a long way in reducing the testing costs.

Diplomacy and coordination need to be established with countries like India, which produce Hydroxychloroquine. This needs to be done such that the treatment can be readily acquired and distributed. Information sharing could play an extremely important role to determine the demand for the drug and thereby reduce stress on the national economies of the countries in the process of acquiring treatment and capacity from abroad.

Recovery from the Coronavirus primarily hinges on ensuring a smooth return to normalcy after the Coronavirus cases have reduced and lock-downs are lifted. This return to normalcy is threatened due to rising risks to the social and economic systems in the world. Financial boosters to Coronavirus testing, treatment and lockdown hit sectors will result in diversion of funds from already underfunded and weakened public health and welfare projects. This will result in further weakening of social systems such as education, employment, sanitation, health and energy. Preservation of these systems needs to be ensured for quick and sustainable recovery following the coronavirus decline.



Globalisation could be a potential key to ensuring continued strength of these systems with countries collaborating to support one another. Governments need to ensure continued activity in these fields by not only pumping liquidity into these sectors through the help of loans and aid from multilateral organisations, but need to work on the demand side of the economy by reviving the markets. Countries could support each other by quickly absorbing the workforce in the rapidly boosted manufacturing and service sectors after the current crisis. This would result in global employment being ensured through adequate testing, resulting in an economic inflow which can be used to strengthen the other welfare systems.



Unlike the Osaka Leaders' Summit at G20 last year, the emergency G20 meeting to combat Corona failed due to the blame game that both US President Trump and Chinese President Jinping have resorted to.

### **Making multilateralism great again**

The staunch opposition to the World Health Organization from the United States of America, which has resulted in the United States leaving the World Health Organization, along with their previously consistent efforts to hinder WHO's empowerment such as the one at the G20 emergency meeting on 19th April resulted in the 52-paragraph draft communique for strengthening WHO to go unpublished and unimplemented. This has put on display the prominent cracks in the pillar that kept the international structures together. Support to WHO's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan and other multilateral institutions is imperative to combat the Coronavirus effectively.

Containment of a global pandemic requires immediate response teams, analyst groups, logistical capabilities for deployment of these teams, and scientists for development of protocols and guidelines to guide the masses from contracting this virus. The Organization has also been



successful in implementing innovative solutions such as its collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and WhatsApp for educating health workers, educators, community leaders, nonprofits, local governments and local businesses through the WhatsApp Coronavirus Information Hub.

The World Health Organization has the necessary infrastructure, capability to develop strategies and implementation of these through global dissemination of its resources for containment and prevention of this virus, and the failure to empower and better equip them will have a massively detrimental impact on the international community.

The Organization was quick to establish the COVID-19 Response Fund, which needs as much as US\$ 675 million as total resource requirements for the first iteration of the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan by the Organization. As the Organization works to release the next iteration of the Plan, the international community needs to be prepared to see an increased financial ask to combat the virus. On the positive side, contributors such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and numerous other governments were one of the highest contributors to the Fund along with several other foundations and societies determined to protect the world and the humanity from Coronavirus.

United States was one of the highest contributors to this Fund, contributing more than US\$30 million. With the US leaving the WHO, the world needs to step up and fill the financial gap that the United States will be leaving in the near future for the Organization and its efforts to combat Coronavirus.

### **Coordination for survival**

The global leadership and the international community needs to opt for more sustainable and balanced solutions while handling and recovering from this crisis. Collectivism can be adopted in policy intervention through information sharing, transparency, pooling of resources, coordination between the public and private sector, and most importantly between the governments at multilateral and regional organizations.

The World Health Organization requires financial, political, backing and assistance during these difficult times. It is the collectivist responsibility of the governments and people alike, and it is high time we accept the same.