

Policy Review  
**World response to COVID-19:  
Time to set new goals and priorities**

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November 17, 2020



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A publication of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI).

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Sustainable Development Policy Institute is an independent, non-profit research institute on sustainable development.

First edition: November 2020

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## **Abstract**

*The coronavirus, also called COVID-19, not only affected the health of large populations but also hit hard the developed and developing economies. The pandemic impact on the superpowers was so worst that it exposed their healthcare facilities. The world, however, responded to the pandemic in different ways starting from lockdowns to the opening of a few sectors under certain SOPs. This study highlights a few important steps taken by different countries to cope with this pandemic so as to bring life towards normalcy. The world should focus on the future and understand that what went wrong. Opportunity is the outcome of every crisis and this time the world needs to set new priorities and goals for the safety of their future generations. It's time to respond to Sustainable Development Goals instead of spending hefty amounts on military might and fighting wars.*

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## **1. Introduction**

With the start of winter 2020, a second wave of COVID-19 pandemic has started. The virus had played havoc with the lives of people of Wuhan city, China in December 19 and later within days it spread to the whole except Antarctica. Now, the pandemic is increasing day by day at an alarming level. So far, 54 million people have been affected in the world due to coronavirus, and the number of deaths reported is over 1.3 million. Countries have tried to overcome the disease through different means, including testing and tracing, social distancing, imposing lockdowns, limiting travel and transport, banning large gatherings such as concerts, marriages, public meetings, and sport events, halting educational activities, etc. Everyday people are losing jobs and small businesses with no hope of returning to normalcy.

This study aims to overview the generic steps taken by different countries and discusses some out of box solutions and coping strategies in this chaotic situation.

## **2. World early response to COVID-19**

China responded the disease with total lockdown and later followed by some other countries. Owing to lack of information about the virus, China mishandled the pandemic in the early weeks, however effective and extreme steps were taken in late January and early February 2020 to control the disease which later proved successful. In late December 2019, Chinese health experts raised alarms about a new disease that was infecting Wuhan residents. In fact, the etiology of the disease was not known to them. That's why, inaction on the part of governmental players clogged information drifts and delayed a harmonized public health response for about a month. Problematic were the delays of Chinese leadership in enacting effective control measures and communicating the seriousness of the situation internationally (Kyle 2020).

On 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2020, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson asked his health secretary to chair a meeting of Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBRA) - the government's emergency committee, instead of chairing the meeting himself when the coronavirus first confirmed in England that day. The government of England missed the opportunity to predict what's coming as Johnson at the start of February didn't chair the meeting. The government remained unaware of the need to sort out stocks of oxygen supplies, personal protection equipment (PPE), large-scale testing and other preparations (Billy 2020).

In January or a little earlier, the United States received the first reports of coronavirus coming over blue oceans. The first American death due to coronavirus was reported on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2020 by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. By the mid of March, it was thought that coronavirus cases were rising fast in America, but they had already reached the point of no return. At that time, numerous regulations and rules were imposed to flatten the curve through

social distancing but in vain. The measures ranged from closure of parks and schools through strict shelter in place rules for all (Jacquelyn 2020).

On March 25, 2020, when there were less than 150 cases of the virus and no deaths, New Zealand imposed a countrywide lockdown (Raja 2020). India also forced its people to go for 21 days lockdown. Although middle-class and most wealthy Indians made it through these 21 days unharmed, able to crawl down, access some modicum of entertainment and work from home, the Indian’s vulnerable communities and its huge number of transient migrants struggled to survive (Vidya 2020). Rest of the world also responded in a similar way. Trillions of dollars have been spent to cope with the emergent situation emerged after the disastrous pandemic. The tables below show the allocations made by the big economies and multilateral institutes in this regard.

Tables: Economic response of the world to COVID-19

Countries	Economic package to fight COVID-19
China	60% of GDP
Germany	€350 billion
Japan	\$1 trillion
United Kingdom	£400 billion
United States	\$2 trillion

Multilateral Institutes	Economic Package to fight COVID-19
European Union	€500 billion
International Monetary Fund	\$100 billion
World Bank	\$150 billion
United Nations	\$200 billion

### 3. Iconic response of different countries during pandemic

**Pakistan:** By planting trees in the pandemic, Pakistan is paying its people who are out of jobs. Tens of thousands of new jungle jobs were created. Construction workers can now earn \$3 a day by planting saplings. This is enough to feed their families during lockdown. Although lockdown restrictions have been lifted allowing workers to continue their work, they have been asked to maintain social distancing and wear masks.

**England:** To protect drivers from COVID-19, London has made bus travel free. Now, passengers on board the bus through the middle door and can no longer tap the card reader installed by the driver’s window. The new rules keep the driver in safe distance from passengers. London hotels are also offering beds to rough sleepers to help contain COVID-19.

**China:** Chinese scientists have built a robot to help doctors in the fight against Coronavirus. Robot can do tests usually performed by medical staff and can be controlled from a different room or even other city. It's letting medics do their jobs without the risk of infection. It can take swabs and scans, check temperatures, give out medicine and listen to the heart and lungs of patients.

**Tanzania:** Tanzania with public-private partnership is turning waste plastic bottles into coronavirus face shields. It takes less than three minutes to make one and cost just \$1. Hundreds of shields have been prepared so far. These are being used in hospitals across the country. Generally, companies recycle wastepaper and sell it to mills.

**South Korea:** South Korea Café is staffed by robots to protect people from coronavirus. From taking orders to delivering bills and collecting money, almost no humans are involved.

**Jordan:** Jordan built a Lego Robot hand sanitizer to fight coronavirus. It dispenses sanitizer automatically so that a person has not to touch the bottle. It's made of simple Lego bricks with a movement sensor and robotic brain.

**France:** France is paying for cycling lessons and bike repairs to fight coronavirus and air pollution. Encouraging more could reduce the risk of next wave of COVID-19 by cutting crowds travelling on public transports and more cyclists could help keep pollution levels down.

**New Zealand – a success story:** New Zealand defeated the pandemic successfully. They kept their nerves under control and followed the basic principles to protect its people. The government has been pursuing an elimination strategy since 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020. When the number of confirmed cases reached 100, they announced an immediate lockdown, closed offices, schools and non-essential services with the aim to control the disease transmission. They started testing and contact tracing. New Zealand's population of just 4.8 million makes widespread testing more achievable and work had begun on contact tracing in vulnerable communities. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern admitted that, being an island nation, they had a distinct advantage. With its isolated location meaning far fewer international flight arrivals and no shared land borders made immigration and quarantine easier to control. They announced strict travel for almost a month; non-residents had been banned from entering the country. Officials introduced strict 14-day quarantine for citizens returning home. Let's see how long New Zealand can keep their borders close and what will happen once it opens its borders.

## **4. Conclusion**

Scientists and doctors in different countries are working day and night to find a cure for COVID-19, but there is no medicine or vaccine available so far. It has also been observed that the world has not learnt much from previous endemics and epidemics like Ebola and Spanish flu. Although most of the countries are tackling this pandemic in a similar way, a country like New Zealand is just doing what has to be done to avoid the maximum loss. Another thing is that it doesn't matter how hard a country is working to strengthen its economy, life is the priority. COVID-19 has also exposed that the world is still not technologically advanced

enough to overcome such a gigantic chaos and crisis. It is also very clear that even the most developed countries are not prepared for such disasters in terms of health facilities and social protection. Even the Multilateral Institutes like United Nations, IMF, European Union and World Bank are facing the heat of the pandemic.

Knowing the fact that this pandemic is a disaster for which no country and no economy was ready to face, it is still needed to understand that Countries need to learn from each other to cope the situation. If different countries will not work together and learn from each other the ways to tackle this pandemic, the world will face more adverse effects of this pandemic and these effects will remain in lives for a long period of time. Every country is trying to fight against this pandemic in their on possible way depending upon either on their economic strength or institutional strength but this pandemic is more than just a disease and countries needed to learn different possible ways to mitigate this pandemic from each other.

## **5. Policy Recommendations**

- The world needs to understand that working together for some time is not obligatory, but it is mandatory. This is the time to work on 17<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal for sustainable development.
- Secondly, taking the case study of New Zealand, it is necessary to take basic and hard steps in such disastrous situation. The world should focus on the future and need to realize that what went wrong.
- Instead of just spending hefty budgets on strengthening their military might and fighting wars, it should be rationalized towards health and social protection.
- Developing countries, like Pakistan, need to bring some sense of priority settings. Every crisis comes with an opportunity and this is an opportunity for the world to set new goals and priorities for the safety of their future generations.

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