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Health Security in a Post-COVID World: Lessons from a Global Health Crisis



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THE ONGOING COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented change for global society. As we witnessed throughout 2020, the pandemic brutally exposed gaps and frailties in the global health system. For instance, the disruption of supply chains and sudden spike in coronavirus cases during the initial stages of the crisis led to a scarcity of essential medical equipment such as [ventilators](#) and [medical-grade oxygen](#). Overstretched bed capacity and staff also meant that many COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients were not getting the treatments they needed.

While the world spends approximately US\$7.5 trillion each year on health, we have yet to plug large public health gaps in rural and conflict-stricken areas. Lack of access to

healthcare services and poor infrastructure are major issues that vulnerable populations living in these areas face. A World Health Organisation [report](#) indicates that based on current trends, universal health coverage will still not be achievable by 2030. If anything, this pandemic has provided a clarion call for significant improvements in the way societies and governments approach public health. Current policies and practices need to be relooked, and if necessary, revamped.

This global health crisis calls attention to the need for clearer division of labour and well-defined responsibilities during pandemic responses. This is evident when we look at the experiences of some Southeast Asian states such as Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand which have had relatively more

success in containing the virus as compared to many other countries. The governments from these countries were quick to implement strict containment measures and enforce the mandatory use of masks. They also carried out rigorous contact tracing and quarantine measures to prevent the spread of the virus within their borders. While there is no perfect system of governance, it cannot be denied that a swift and decisive response is needed in the event of any disease outbreak.

The building up of resilient health systems is essential not just for coping with the current coronavirus pandemic; it also acts as a bulwark against other types of diseases that people face daily. There is a need to invest in strong primary health care, with increased emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention. While curative care should not be neglected, preventive-centred initiatives and systems can help to increase the efficiency of health spending by targeting the root

causes of disease outbreaks.

Increased engagement with new or emerging technologies can also improve the robustness of healthcare systems. For instance, the use of [telemedicine](#) could be a way to link patients with medical personnel without the need for travel or physical contact. While this is not a new practice in the healthcare industry, it has gained more attention in recent times due to social distancing measures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. It allows for more access and helps to amplify the capacity of healthcare professionals. 2020 has been a huge training ground for people in the use of digital technology; the future of healthcare seems to be headed in this direction as well.

It is important to note that spending on improving healthcare infrastructure alone will not be sufficient. Resources also need to be allocated to public initiatives, which can help to raise public awareness of infectious disease outbreaks. This can include educating the

public on good hygiene practices, the need for social distancing during an outbreak, as well as how to avoid succumbing to pandemic misinformation. Particularly with the rollout of the vaccine, the need to curb misinformation becomes even more pressing. Governments should provide citizens with accurate updates from trusted sources in a timely and transparent manner. This will go a long way in convincing the public of both the efficacy and safety of the vaccine.

The sheer scale and impact of COVID-19 might be the impetus needed to spur reform in the healthcare sector and push the world towards achieving its goal of universal health coverage. As we attempt to navigate this 'new' world, the need to innovate and adapt takes on paramount significance.

Suggested Readings

- Khor Swee Kheng, 2021, "5 Health Policy Insights From Asia After a Year of Covid-19", *The Straits Times*, <<https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/5-health-policy-insights-from-asia-after-a-year-of-covid-19>>.
- Linda Lacina, 2020, "COVID-19 Reveals Gaps in Health Systems: WHO Briefing", World Economic Forum, <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid-19-reveals-gaps-in-public-health-system-who-briefing/>>.
- Jose M. L. Montesclaros and Mely Caballero-Anthony, 2020, "Lessons From Covid: Tackling Disease With a City-by-city Approach", *The Interpreter*, <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/lessons-covid-tackling-disease-city-city-approach>>.
- Pamela On, 2020, "Telehealth Gets a Boost From COVID-19 Pandemic", *CNA*, <<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/telehealth-gets-a-boost-from-covid-19-pandemic-12945990>>.
- World Health Organisation, 2019, *Primary Health Care on the Road to Universal Health Coverage: 2019 Global Monitoring Report*, <https://www.who.int/healthinfo/universal_health_coverage/report/uhc_report_2019.pdf>.

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Battling marine plastic waste: Nuclear technology's role

Marine plastic pollution has worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic. Nuclear technology provides a sustainable and scientific approach to tackling this environmental problem. Can it help Southeast Asian countries battle plastic pollution?

Julius Cesar Trajano

RSIS Commentaries

3 February 2021

Climate change may have had 'key role' in Covid-19 pandemic: Study

The virus is thought to have originated in bats in Southeast Asia. The changing climate and habitat destruction in Asia had driven virus-carrying species into ever closer contact with human populations.

AFP

The Straits Times

5 February 2021

Opening of 4th desalination plant a boost to water security

Singapore took another step towards boosting its water security in the face of climate change by opening its fourth desalination plant - the only one capable of treating sea and reservoir water.

Audrey Tan and Ng Keng Gene

The Straits Times

5 February 2021

Paris Agreement emission cuts must nearly double to slow climate change, new research shows

Nations need to increase the average rate of decline in planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions from 1% to 1.8% per year to meet the Paris climate agreement limit.

Gina Heeb

Forbes

9 February 2021

Singapore unveils Green Plan 2030, outlines green targets for next 10 years

It is a "whole-of-nation movement" to advance the national agenda on sustainable development. New car registrations are required to be cleaner-energy models from 2030.

Ang Hwee Min and Matthew Mohan

Channel News Asia

10 February 2021

Climate change: China's energy regulator proposes target of 40 per cent renewables by 2030

This is up from 28.2 per cent last year. The National Energy Administration also called for the share of power generated from non-hydro renewable sources to be raised to 25.9 per cent by 2030 - from 10.8 per cent last year.

Echo Xie

South China Morning Post

10 February 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Asian water development outlook 2020

Asian Water Development Outlook (AWDO) 2020 reveals how national water security has been improving across Asia and the Pacific since water security was first quantified in AWDO 2013

Asian Development Bank

Manila: ADB

2020

Adaptation gap report 2020

While nations have advanced in planning, huge gaps remain in finance for developing countries and bringing adaptation projects to the stage where they bring real protection against climate impacts. Nature-based solutions must become a priority.

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi: UNEP

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2021

The Forum provides a regional perspective on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by identifying regional trends as well as consolidating and sharing best practices and lessons learned.

Bangkok, Thailand

23-26 March 2021

International Mother Earth Day

The Mother Earth Day, coinciding with the Super Year of Biodiversity, is focused on its role as an indicator of the Earth's health.

Worldwide

22 April 2021

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Governments across Southeast Asia accelerate renewable energy investment to revive the pandemic-hit economies

To improve the renewable energy capacity and revive the pandemic-hit economies, ASEAN governments have laid out an aspirational five-year sustainability plan under the second phase of ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) 2021-2025.

Power Technology

21 January 2021

PHL ready for shift to clean-energy regime—DOE

An official of the Department of Energy claimed that they are strongly pushing for the development of renewable energy (RE) sources and low- and no-carbon sources like natural gas, hydrogen and nuclear to create a cleaner, more sustainable future for the Philippines.

Lorenz Marasigan

Business Mirror

22 January 2021

Asia's record gas prices underline the need to make its markets more resilient

While milder weather will alleviate the immediate pressure on Asian gas markets, policy reforms are needed to improve market resilience and flexibility, especially given the role of gas in balancing the growing share of variable renewable energy sources.

Jean-Baptiste Dubreuil and Gergely Molnar

International Energy Agency

25 January 2021

Villages in Japan are competing to become a nuclear waste site

Two fishing villages in Hokkaido are vying to host the final storage facility for more than 19,000 tonnes of high-level nuclear waste that have accumulated since Japan started generating nuclear power in 1966. They hope that the expected revenue from hosting the facility can reverse their economic decline.

Bloomberg

The Straits Times

3 February 2021

World's largest battery to be built in Australia coal-mining hub

Australia is planning another giant grid-scale battery to store energy for the grid as it raises its share of renewable power. Companies aim to build bigger batteries to maximise Australia's vast potential for wind and solar power generation.

Bloomberg

The Straits Times

5 February 2021

China's carbon trading market hobbled by unanswered questions

China has, for the first time, required local firms to shoulder the responsibility for mitigating the country's greenhouse gas emissions by buying and selling emission quotas on a unified national carbon market.

Du Caicai and Chen Xuewan

The Straits Times

8 February 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

IAEA Bulletin: 10 years of Peaceful Uses Initiative

This IAEA Bulletin celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Peaceful Uses Initiative. It highlights the peaceful applications of nuclear energy and the role of nuclear technology in helping countries achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Vol. 61, No. 4

2020

Small modular reactors and advanced reactor security: Regulatory perspectives on integrating physical and cyber security by design to protect against malicious acts and evolving threats

How can future nuclear technologies and Small Modular Reactors deter and prevent malicious actors from attempting to steal or sabotage nuclear materials and facilities? This paper presents the benefits of integrating Security by Design into a regulatory framework.

Raphael Duguay

International Journal of Nuclear Security

Vol. 7, No.1

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

SIEW Energy Insights Webinar - Asia's Role in the Energy Transition

This webinar featured a panel of industry experts who discussed Asia's role in the clean energy transition. This webinar was hosted in partnership with the Atlantic Council Global Energy Forum and supported by the British Chamber of Commerce in Singapore.

Recorded Webinar

22 January 2021

2nd Cleaner Energy Future Initiative for ASEAN (CEFIA) Forum- ASEAN Centre for Energy Webinar

At the 2nd CEFIA Forum, ASEAN+3 government officials, international organisations, universities, and private companies gathered online to share progress on activities and discuss future activities aimed at energy transition and the realisation of a low-carbon society in the ASEAN region.

Recorded Webinar

2 February 2021

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Global food fraud rising as result of pandemic, report finds

A 37% rise in global food fraud cases has been recorded, including a 30% rise in adulteration and a 47% rise in counterfeits. Vigilance and law enforcement are critical in dismantling the criminal networks behind food fraud.

George Nott

The Grocer

28 January 2021

Prevent the next food crisis now

Stretched government budgets in battling the COVID-19 pandemic are creating the potential for a food crisis through the inability to support domestic food consumption. Approaches are needed to address short-term as well as longer-term causes of food insecurity.

Mark Lowcock and Axel Van Trotsenburg

The World Bank Blogs

2 February 2021

Cash injection urged to help poor fight COVID-19 during vaccine wait

A steep rise in COVID-19-induced food insecurity has been reported among children, with potential lasting impact on their health, education and future earnings. Amid fears that poorer countries may not get vaccines until 2024, cash transfers are urgently needed.

Emma Batha

ABS CBN News

7 February 2021

Committee on World Food Security kicks off calling for comprehensive transformation of agri-food systems

The 47th Session of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) called for joint action towards a comprehensive transformation of global agri-food systems, in inclusivity, resilience and sustainability, in the fight against all forms of malnutrition.

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

8 February 2021

Covid-19-induced crises of hunger and poverty require bold, effective international response

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) has called on the international community, including governments and multilateral organizations, to take action to mitigate the crises of hunger and poverty, through cash transfers and aid in recovery from the crisis.

Poverty Action Lab

8 February 2021

How commodity exchange may ensure food security, jobs

Commodity food exchanges have the potential to address post-harvest wastage and marketing challenges. These close the gap for manufacturers/processors in-between production and off-seasons, thus contributing to employment creation too.

Femi Ibirogbá

The Guardian

8 February 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food fraud vulnerability in food supply networks

According to the Routine Activities Theory, disturbance in routine practices affect crime and criminal behaviour. This study finds this relevant to fraud in the food sector, which makes pre-COVID control measures inadequate.

Saskia M. van Ruth

Wageningen Food Safety Research Report No.

2020.017

2020

Poverty, food insecurity, and social protection during COVID-19 in Myanmar: Combined evidence from a household telephone survey and micro-simulations

This study assesses the welfare impacts of COVID-19 on households in Myanmar, providing insights on both the on-the-ground impacts of COVID-19 in recent months and the potential poverty reduction impacts of social protection measures in 2021.

Derek D. Headey et al.

Myanmar SSP Policy Note 35, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

RECOVR Webinar Series | Using Evidence to Inform Social Policy in the Time of COVID-19: RECOVR Survey Results from the Philippines

This webinar presented shared findings from a survey in the Philippines on how policymakers are using evidence-based policy making to adapt their responses to changing demands and to plan for long-term strategies.

Recorded Webinar

1 September 2020

Advancing Equitable Livelihoods in Food Systems

The United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs' Global Policy Dialogue highlighted agricultural and non-agricultural technologies or tools to ensure sustainable productivity, nutrition and livelihoods in rural settings.

Recorded Webinar

16 December 2020

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Covid-19: Study showing Oxford vaccine slows virus spread 'superb' - Hancock

Results that show the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine might reduce the spread of coronavirus have been hailed as "absolutely superb" by the UK health secretary.

BBC

3 February 2021

Japan says its world-class health system is buckling under Covid

Coronavirus infections in Japan are at a fraction of major western countries, yet the island nation is signaling increasing concern that its highly rated medical system faces impending collapse.

Bloomberg

The Business Times

9 February 2021

Has the pandemic really caused a 'tsunami' of mental health problems?

Governments can help preserve the population's mental health by protecting people from the economic consequences of the pandemic and by providing practical support to parents of young children.

Richard Bentall

The Guardian

9 February 2021

Smartphones could help manage chronic cardio-pulmonary disease, predict next pandemic

Smartphones with sensors and apps could significantly enhance remote monitoring due to their ubiquity, and do not require patients to have additional expensive gadgets.

Emily Henderson

News Medical

10 February 2021

Parkinson's disease: Scientists take 'vital step' towards finding a cure

Scientists have made a 'vital step' towards finding a cure for Parkinson's disease. Their research breaks new ground in understanding the role of a key protein called alpha-synuclein, which is present in the brain and plays a number of important roles.

Ivor Bennett

Sky News

10 February 2021

What the WHO COVID-19 experts learnt in Wuhan

A World Health Organization (WHO) team left China after gaining some new insights into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic that has now killed more than 2.3 million people worldwide, but with the major questions still unanswered.

AP

Channel News Asia

11 February 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Intergovernmental engagement on health impacts of climate change

This study aims to examine countries' engagement with the health impacts of climate change in their formal statements to intergovernmental organizations, and the factors driving engagement.

Nihar Dasandi et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 2
2021

Government trust, perceptions of COVID-19 and behaviour change: Cohort surveys, Singapore

This study aims to evaluate how public perceptions and trust in government communications affected the adoption of protective behaviour in Singapore during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vanessa W Lim et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 2
2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

COVID-19 Vaccines: Now, Later or Never?

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe? Will there be long-term side effects? What are the differences between the different vaccines? With Singapore's vaccination programme underway, this webinar discussed the public's concerns over the safety and potential side effects of the vaccines.

Recorded Webinar

7 January 2021

Reimagining Public Health: Global Leadership Perspectives for a Post-COVID World

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed our lives and may define a generation. This webinar discussed how best to sustain advances, build durable health infrastructure, and leverage effective public-private partnerships to manage the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Recorded Webinar

4 February 2021

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Climate-fueled disasters killed 475,000 people over 20 Years

Nearly a half-million people, mostly from the world's poorest countries, died over the past two decades from conditions associated with climate disasters, according to new findings from the nonprofit Germanwatch.

Daniel Cusick
Scientific American
 27 January 2021

How advertisers defund crisis journalism

Hard news about humanitarian and social issues is being treated as toxic by overzealous ad technology, undermining corporate social responsibility and effectively punishing publishers for reporting on international crises.

Ben Parker
The New Humanitarian
 27 January 2021

Re-evaluating the military's role in disaster response

With the potential constraints on funding leaving governments more inclined to focus on the domestic context, disruptions to defence policy seem unavoidable. For militaries to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19, they must shift their focus to better suit the changing circumstances.

S. Nanthini
The Interpreter
 27 January 2021

You can't talk about disaster risk reduction without talking about inequality

Socio-economic inequality is likely to continue to increase and with it disaster risk for those countries, communities, households and businesses that have only limited opportunities to manage their risks and strengthen their resilience.

Dale Dominey-Howes
The Conversation
 1 February 2021

Myanmar's political crisis could spell humanitarian disaster if aid groups are restricted

Following the political crisis in Myanmar on 1 February, aid organisations are concerned about the impact on the humanitarian situation and relief operations in the country.

Norwegian Refugee Council
 4 February 2021

ITU to advance AI capabilities to contend with natural disasters

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) – the United Nations specialised agency for information and communication technologies – has launched a new Focus Group to contend with the increasing prevalence and severity of natural disasters with the help of artificial intelligence (AI).

International Telecommunication Union
 9 February 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Filling the disaster data gap: Lessons from cataloging Singapore's past disasters

This paper assesses the lessons learned from cataloging Singapore's past disasters. It presents four key lessons in order to examine and support current and future disaster resilience.

Yolanda C. Lin et al.
International Journal of Disaster Risk Science
 2021

APDIM preliminary assessment of the gaps and needs for disaster risk information and data management platforms in Asia and the Pacific Region

This report provides an overview of available risk datasets covering the Asia-Pacific and looks at proposals to support countries in understanding disaster risk and using risk information.

Sahar Safaei et al.
Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management
 2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rethinking Humanitarianism Podcast: Inside the Donor Mindset

In order for humanitarian reform priorities to be effective, they need proper funding to sustain their activities. This podcast tackled the political economy of UN reform and methods of dealing with rising needs at a time of shrinking donor budgets.

Recorded Podcast
 3 February 2021

Disaster Governance and Prospects of Inter-Regional Partnership in the Asia-Pacific

This webinar presents the findings and observations on the disaster governance landscape and future developments in the Pacific. It also discusses disaster management frameworks and initiatives that ASEAN has institutionalised.

Webinar
 25 February 2021

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

World migration down 30% due to Covid-19 pandemic: UN

According to the UN report entitled *International Migration 2020*, global migration has slowed by nearly 30 percent, with around two million fewer people than predicted migrating between 2019 and 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

AFP

The Straits Times

16 January 2021

Relocations, reduced services leave Rohingya communities at breaking point in Bangladesh

Already restricted by harsh conditions, the COVID-19 pandemic added even more stress to their life. With life in the camps showing no signs of improving and efforts to relocate some refugees to address the overcrowding, the Rohingya communities in Cox's Bazaar seem to be reaching a breaking point.

Médecins Sans Frontières

21 January 2021

The pandemic is no excuse to shut the door on refugee resettlement

COVID-19 has increased the vulnerability of refugees as countries use the pandemic as an excuse to reduce the number of refugees allowed to resettle in 2021 – even as refugee needs continue to climb.

Evan Jones and Najeeba Wazefadost

The New Humanitarian

25 January 2021

Migration not seen as solution by those in flood zone

Despite frequent flooding in coastal regions in the Philippines, most residents do not yet consider migration as a short-term solution. Reasons for this lack of permanent migration include a strong sense of place and occupational attachment.

Megan DeMint

Cornell Chronicle

2 February 2021

Migrants play key role in disaster response, IOM explores diaspora's engagement in humanitarian assistance

Contributions of migrants to their home countries do not just stop at remittances. Highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, diasporas have forged creative, transnational responses to support their communities including providing supplies to hospitals.

International Organization for Migration

5 February 2021

UNHCR and IOM welcome Colombia's decision to regularize Venezuelan refugees and migrants

Colombia has started an initiative to provide ten-year temporary protection status to Venezuelans in the country. The Temporary Protection Status will also provide access to basic services including the national health system and COVID-19 vaccination plans.

International Organization for Migration and United Nations Refugee Agency

8 February 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

International migration 2020

This report looks at the trend of global migration flows in 2020. It shows how COVID-19 has impacted the livelihoods of millions of migrants and their families, as well as undermined progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

2020

Resolving post-disaster displacement: Insights from the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda)

This report analyses efforts to resolve the displacement crisis generated by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. It explores obstacles to the pursuit of solutions for the crisis, and identifies insights that may inform other post-disaster contexts.

Angela Sherwood et al.

Geneva: International Organization for Migration

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Critical Role of Ethics in Forced Migration Research: Refugee Participation, Do No Harm, and the IASFM Code of Ethics

While researchers have to engage refugees while doing research on forced migration, this comes with ethical considerations. This webinar discussed the particular ethical challenges faced by researchers and how these can be addressed.

Recorded Webinar

10 December 2020

Legal Response to Cross-Border 'Environmental' Mobility

This webinar discussed how international, regional and national legal frameworks can address cross-border mobility issues. It explored how refugee, human rights and migration laws can be used in this context.

Recorded Webinar

11 February 2021