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# **COVID-19 AND ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN PANDEMICS**

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## **Introduction**

Human beings are continuously facing an unpredictable power of nature. The continuous evolution of infections or infectious diseases which often comes without warning poses very high risk of threat to human life. The social, environmental, economic and demographic changes play an important role in increasing public health crisis which often give rise to pandemics. The spread of such diseases which takes the form of a pandemic is wide and quick affecting greater number of people covering majority of areas, countries. The situation of such a nature has greater impact on global economy. With the increase of globalisation and urbanisation there is a rapid increase in human population also, due to which there is more likely emerging situation of viruses which spread fast and far. There can also be a situation where it is almost impossible to predict the source of virus but it may have adverse effect on human life.<sup>1</sup>

One such pandemic emerged recently in 21<sup>st</sup> century is Covid-19 or SARS-CoV-2, commonly known as corona virus. The spread of corona virus has become limitless affecting almost all the countries in the world. The global spread of this virus is something more than a public health crisis, causing social and economic disruption. Covid-19 is not the first pandemic as the world has experienced several pandemics since history, from Plague of Justinian in 541 CE to Spanish flu and Asian flu in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; from H1N1 Swine flu to Covid-19 in 21<sup>st</sup> century and AIDS till present.<sup>2</sup> The unprecedented crisis triggered global health, humanitarian and human rights crisis. Whenever a pandemic like situation arises it reverses the decades of hard won development gains of a nation as well as exacerbates the vulnerabilities globally. The dramatic shifts in demographics and with rise of globalization and urbanisation, the spread of infectious diseases across globe

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, The re-emergence of infectious diseases, Managing epidemics: key facts about major deadly diseases, (Mar 27, 2022, 05:48 pm),

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/managing-epidemics-interactive.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Owen Jarus, 20 of the worst epidemics and pandemics in history, Livescience, (Mar 27, 2022, 05:59 pm),

<https://www.livescience.com/worst-epidemics-and-pandemics-in-history.html>

increased, having great impact on societies reinforcing the human perception of frailty and mortality.<sup>3</sup> The novel corona virus can be compare to 1918 Spanish flu and it can be inferred that between the two lethal pandemics, despite various developments made in science and technology, various effective vaccines made etc. yet the public health response has not been changed in the last 101 years and we are again face- masked and practicing ancient quarantine and isolation procedures.

The outbreak of novel corona virus triggering worldwide attention, in its early stage, affected four major countries i.e., China, Japan, Thailand and Korea with total confirmed cases of 282. But after monitoring the situation closely, it was assessed that the risk is not limited to regional level but it will have a high risk of affecting people globally.<sup>4</sup> In the month of February there are 99% cases reported in China and 97% of deaths in the province of Hubei.<sup>5</sup>

It is a serious global crisis growing at an exponential rate. World health Organisation in collaboration with other organisation like UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO etc at international level and other organizations at national level is working urgently to tackle with such serious global issue and to coordinate with the development of medical countermeasures.

This article will review the origin of novel corona virus pandemic comparing with all the other pandemics took place; how it affected the world socially, economically, politically and environmentally and the role of International Organisation to tackle with such serious issue affecting world at large which is the main concern of the present article.

## **Pandemics: A Long Series Of Scourges**

Pandemic, in its literal sense means “widespread of a disease over a whole country or a world.” It is defined as an epidemic occurring worldwide, crossing international boundaries and affecting large number of people.<sup>6</sup> The impact of pandemics will always be catastrophic. The outbreak of a pandemic is a worldwide issue as it has the potential to devastate countries and put the progress of a nation in halt. Throughout the course of history, diseases and illnesses have tormented humanity,

<sup>3</sup> A. Cowell, Photos from a Century of Epidemics, New York Times, March 20, 2020, (Mar 27, 2022, 06:26 pm), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/20/world/europe/coronavirus-aids-spanish-flu-ebola-epidemics.html>

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization (2020). WHO Statement regarding cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China, (Mar 27, 2022, 06:39 pm), <https://www.who.int/china/news/detail/09-01-2020-who-statement-regarding-cluster-of-pneumonia-cases-in-wuhan-china>

<sup>5</sup> WHO (2020), Opening remarks at the technical briefing on 2019 corona virus, (Mar 27, 2022, 07:22 pm), <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-technical-briefing-on-2019-novel-coronavirus>

<sup>6</sup> 154, John M. Last, A dictionary of epidemiology, 93-94, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)

signalling the end of entire human civilization. Dating from pre-historic to modern times, there are number of worst pandemics which ravaged humanity such as- Plague of Justinian; Black Death; Yellow Fever; Spanish Flu; Asian Flu; Bird Flu; Swine Flu and many more. Millions of people dies, thousands of people were infected due to this. The more civilised human became, the more likely pandemics occurred. The building of new empires, widespread trade and commerce routes for humans and animals facilitated the spread of disease. The earliest cities has one thing in common with the current Wuhan city of China is that human beings lived with close proximity with animals due to which the contagion transferred from animals to humans.<sup>7</sup> The best example to quote here is novel Corona Virus or COVID-19.

Looking at the history of pandemics, the worst pandemic in human history is Plague of Justinian in the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century (541 CE), where half of the population of Europe had perished. This plague caused massive economic struggle. The plague, named 'Black Death' also called 'Bubonic Plague', again came after 800 years, in 1347 which lasted for 350 years and killed one-third of the population in Europe.<sup>8</sup> The symptoms of both plague and Black Death were very similar. Both the pandemics had drastic effect which changed the social fabric of the western world permanently. Earlier, there was not a known cure for such diseases therefore plague treatment was limited in nature. People used to perform home remedies like inhalation of aromatic vapours from flowers and herbs and due to shortage of doctors and failing all the approaches to treatment, people started offering magical protection as well.<sup>9</sup>

One of the important things to know about Black Death is, the practice of quarantine started in 14<sup>th</sup> century in order to protect coastal cities from the plague. The word quarantine derived from Italian word 'quaranta giorni' or '40 days'. Today, in the outbreak of corona virus people are practicing quarantine system though it has not come to the severity of any great pandemic like Bubonic Plague. While the interactions created through trade and urban life plays an important role, it is also the deadly nature of particular diseases that indicate the trajectory of a pandemic. Since 1900 with the emergence of influenza virus four major pandemics have occurred they are- Spanish Flu (1918); Asian Flu (1957) and Hong Kong Flu (1968). These have emerged as virulent disease just like recent COVID-19. The rapid spread of these diseases wrecked havoc, caused severe economic losses to countries, corporations and individuals, affected trade and commerce severely.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Mockaitis, [what we can learn from past pandemics](https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/487111-what-we-can-learn-from-past-pandemics), The Hill, March 11, 2020, (Mar 29, 2022, 12:49 pm), <https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/487111-what-we-can-learn-from-past-pandemics>

<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> John Firth, [The History of Pandemics: Three Great Pandemics](https://jmvh.org/article/the-history-of-plague-part-1-the-three-great-pandemics/) (Mar 29, 2022, 01:21 pm) <https://jmvh.org/article/the-history-of-plague-part-1-the-three-great-pandemics/>

The outbreak of Spanish flu was most devastating killing 50-100 million people, although the fatality was low, the incidence of infections was very high.<sup>10</sup> These pandemics caused immense burden on the medical staffs as many people got infected and died within a week. The demand of wartime made shortages of nurses and doctors.<sup>11</sup> It was reported<sup>12</sup> in the year 1957 that Asian flu was a blend of Avian Flu viruses which spread rapidly killing 1.1 million people worldwide and 116,000 deaths in US.

The series of scourges has not ended here. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been marked by major pandemics affecting human life such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS); Ebola; Zika virus; HIV AIDS; H1N1 Swine Flu and recent corona virus. SARS is considered to be the first pandemic of 21<sup>st</sup> century identified in 2003. It is believed to have possibly started in China followed by 26 countries. The worldwide spread of SARS was closely monitored by global health professionals and was seen as a wake-up call to improve outbreak responses, and lessons from the pandemic were used to keep diseases like H1N1, Ebola and Zika under control.<sup>13</sup> Since 1968, first influenza pandemic virus identified was Swine Flu in 2009. According to CDC report, more than 1.4 billion people were infected within one year and approximately 151,700- 575,400 people died.<sup>14</sup> The impact of the infection primarily affected children and young adults by infecting the lower respiratory tract and causing progressive pneumonia in them.<sup>15</sup> In developing countries, the diseases of such a nature pose more threats to public health due to lack of investment in their health infrastructure. A national healthcare system is important to build in order to respond effectively to the health crisis and to prevent their spread to international borders as well.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*, 56-69, (2nd ed Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

<sup>11</sup> Id.

<sup>12</sup> Reported by Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Shkabatur, *A Global Panopticon- the Changing Role of International Organisations in the Information Age*, Michigan Journal of International Law, (Mar 29, 2022, 03:38 pm) <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjil/vol33/iss1/508/>

<sup>14</sup> *2009 H1N1 Pandemic: A report by Centres for Disease Control and Prevention*, (Mar 29, 2022, 03:55 pm) <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/2009-h1n1-pandemic.html>

<sup>15</sup> World Health Organisation(2020), *Clinical Management of Human Infection and Pandemic (H1N1) 2009*, (Mar 29, 2022, 09:37 pm), [https://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/swineflu/clinical\\_management\\_h1n1.pdf](https://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/swineflu/clinical_management_h1n1.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> *Global Pandemics and Global Public Health*, Independent Commission on Multilateralism, (Mar 31, 2022, 09:57 pm) <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Global-Pandemics-and-Global-Public-Health1.pdf>

## The 2019 Corona Virus Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the whole world causing serious global crisis. A novel corona virus was first detected in December 2019 in Wuhan, China after an outbreak of pneumonia. WHO country office in China was notified mass number of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause.<sup>17</sup> The cases increased and after a month WHO declared the outbreak as a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” and after that SARS CoV2 (named later) was declared as pandemic on March 10.<sup>18</sup> With the potential of causing severe social, economic and political disruption, this outbreak had captured global attention. It is believed that the novel corona virus has been originated from the food market at Wuhan in China however, the zoonotic source of it is not confirmed but suggested bats as the main reservoir after a sequence- based analysis. The virus is highly transmittable and transmitted mainly between people through respiratory droplets and contact routes.<sup>19</sup> It can be spread in two ways- firstly, when an infected individual comes in close contact with an uninfected individual by releasing small droplets by way of sneezing, coughing; secondly, transmission through surface contamination.

This crisis is not bound by its effects within the national borders rather it extends its boundary in global space too. Within a short span of time, the disease spread faster and the cases of infected persons and deaths reaches its peak reporting higher in other countries than China. WHO in its report stated that it is not just a public health crisis as it would affect every sector and every individual. WHO has summarised it in four key areas:- prepare and be ready; detect, protect and treat; reduce transmission; innovate and learn. WHO recommended preventive measures such as quarantine system; isolating, testing and tracing every contact to be adopted every country in order to reduce the transmission of disease.<sup>20</sup> In response to such pandemic various countries in the early days of COVID-19 imposed complete lockdown policy and adopted social distancing measures to

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<sup>17</sup> World Health Organisation (2020), Emergency Ministerial meeting on COVID-19 organised by the African Union and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, (Mar 31, 2022, 08:44 pm) <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/emergency-ministerial-meeting-on-covid-19-organized-by-the-african-union-and-the-africa-centres-for-disease-control-and-prevention>

<sup>18</sup> World Health Organization (2020). Statement on the second meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee regarding the outbreak of novel corona virus (2019-nCoV), (Mar 31, 2022, 08:58 pm) <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-mission-briefing-on-covid-19--12-march-2020>

<sup>19</sup> World Health Organisation (2020), Modes of transmission of virus causing COVID-19: implications for IPC precaution recommendations, (Mar 31, 2022, 07:53 pm) <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/modes-of-transmission-of-virus-causing-covid-19-implications-for-ipc-precaution-recommendations>

<sup>20</sup> World Health Organisation (2020), WHO Director General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19- 16 March, 2020, (April 01, 2022, 09:21 pm) <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---16-march-2020>

tackle it. The extensive lockdowns restricted the freedom of movement and in this process the freedom to enjoy many other rights has been restricted. By adopting such measures, the people's livelihood has been affected inadvertently.<sup>21</sup> But it was seen in some countries where people disobeyed the rules of government. For example in UK an incident took place in August where another black people died during encounter with police. It happened when there was complete lockdown in the country and people marched with 'Black Lives Matter' Movement and big UK protest trended. Another example is India where there was sharp rise in corona cases than the rest of the country due to migrant workers. Six states- Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Assam, in the mid June has seen huge spike in cases when migrants started returning to their home states. Therefore, it can be said that people can very easily disobey the government rules and crush the whole idea of social distancing and quarantine procedures. The pandemic requires a coordinated international response for which the role of various international organisations like the WHO, UNESCO, IHR etc as well as the role of local authorities, research centres, health protection agencies etc becomes important.

## **Covid-19 Impacts And Role Of International Organisations**

**World Health Organisation** was founded in 1948 with an aim to attain highest possible level of health by all the people. From 1948, it has been working to promote health and to serve vulnerable people, facing various challenges. The role of WHO as a directing and coordinating authority has been challenged with the creation of new institutions and new initiatives taken by the existing one. For example, in 1980, World Bank entered into health sector and now it has emerged as the world's largest lender in the health, nutrition and population sector of developing countries.<sup>22</sup> With the emergence of new health problems, policies and new organisations like **UNAIDS, GAVI Alliance, UNITAID** etc, to tackle specific disease problems, WHO's credibility and capabilities have been weakened. Early years of WHO was cautious and technical but gradually it is known to be the best for its efforts to control and eradicate particular diseases. There was rapid evolution of the

<sup>21</sup> United Nation, Human Rights are critical- for the response and the recovery, COVID-19 and Human Rights, (April 01, 2022, 08:20 pm)  
[https://www.un.org/victimsofterrorism/sites/www.un.org.victimsofterrorism/files/unhuman\\_rights\\_and\\_covid\\_april\\_20\\_20.pdf](https://www.un.org/victimsofterrorism/sites/www.un.org.victimsofterrorism/files/unhuman_rights_and_covid_april_20_20.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Charles Clift, The Role of the World Health Organisation in International System, Centre on Global Health Security Working Group Papers, (April 01, 2022, 09:31 pm)  
<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2013-02-01-role-world-health-organization-international-system-clift.pdf>

membership from 55 states in 1948 to 194 states as of 2020. Now the question comes here is, how the pandemics were controlled and prevented before the emergence of the WHO or any other organisation? What is the history of previous efforts taken to control the outbreak?

So, looking at the history of pandemics earlier there were not known methods of treatment to control the outbreak. Before 18<sup>th</sup> century, people used to perform home remedies like inhalation of aromatic vapours from flowers and herbs and due to shortage of doctors and failing all the approaches to treatment, people started offering magical protection as well<sup>23</sup> although pandemic such as plague, cholera etc. showed the sign of poor spiritual and moral condition therefore, public effort was made to prevent the spread of disease through isolation and adopting quarantine procedures. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the isolation of ill people and quarantine became common practices to prevent the contagious disease. Earlier, the first known quarantine was adopted during the time of Black Death (Bubonic Plague) in the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1851, France convened first International Sanitary Conferences to address the standardization of quarantine regulations. Quarantine remains in effect in the present time also as we can see it today when the whole world is facing the outbreak of COVID-19. Today, it is considered as highly regulated public health measure both nationally and internationally to combat corona virus. With the passage of time, health became the societal goal to every individual and the protection of health became social responsibility.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish Flu was the first global pandemic occurred in 1918 with devastating consequences for societies. Despite great advances in public health, the origin of this influenza virus remains unknown. This took place in the middle of World War I and within months it had spread to every corner of the world. In 1918, there was neither had any treatment or cure to this flu pandemic nor had any vaccine. Today also the world is facing similar situation as no one has any treatment or cure or vaccine for corona virus. Therefore, it can be said that between the two lethal pandemics, despite various developments made in science and technology, various effective vaccines made etc. yet we are again face- masked and practicing ancient quarantine and isolation procedures.<sup>24</sup>

Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Ebola virus disease is an important wake-up call for all the countries to improve its preparedness for outbreaks. Most experts believed that the exotic pathogens only affect

<sup>23</sup> John Firth, [The History of Pandemics: Three Great Pandemics](https://jmvh.org/article/the-history-of-plague-part-1-the-three-great-pandemics/), JMVH, (April 01, 2022, 01:21 pm)

<https://jmvh.org/article/the-history-of-plague-part-1-the-three-great-pandemics/>

<sup>24</sup> The Indian Express, [Corona virus- afflicted 2020 looks like 1918's Spanish Flu despite science's march](https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2020/may/05/coronavirus-afflicted-2020-looks-like-1918s-spanish-flu-despite-sciences-march-2139523.html), May 05, 2020, (April 02, 2022, 01:30 pm) <https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2020/may/05/coronavirus-afflicted-2020-looks-like-1918s-spanish-flu-despite-sciences-march-2139523.html>

the poor country like Africa and not the wealthy countries but this myth has gone when, in 2003, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) took place affecting people of wealthy urban areas. Then, in 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic took place which was first in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which proved that the virus can spread to every corner of the world despite having high standards of living and well developed health systems.<sup>25</sup> Similar is the case with corona virus. COVID-19 disrupted all and left no country untouched. COVID-19 exposed the inequalities in our health systems and widened the gap between us. The pandemic is still accelerating, so comprehensive approach must be taken to control the outbreak and for that the role of WHO and other organisations, nationally and internationally, is extremely important.

**WHO at the beginning of an outbreak plays an informative role** which is followed by preparedness and response acts. The interim name of virus was recommended by WHO as “**2019-nCoV**”, named as COVID-19 provided by **International Classification of Diseases**. WHO declared the outbreak as “Public Health Emergency of International Concern.”<sup>26</sup> The Emergency Committee on 2019-nCoV under **International Health Regulations (2005)** provided advice to WHO and global community on measures to control the outbreak.<sup>27</sup> International Health Regulations is the only international legal framework governing how WHO and its member states should respond to infectious disease outbreak. With the rapid transmission of disease in a globalized world, there is a chance that the failure state could place the other state in peril therefore global approach to security is required whenever there is a global threat posed by pandemics.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, IHR ensures that there should not be any significant gap at the national level which may threaten the health security of all the countries worldwide. For example, diseases like H1N1 influenza, SARS, MERS etc showed huge gaps in the implementation of revised IHR and WHO’s responsibility to respond to emergencies. Since 2004 (after the outbreak of SARS), South-East Asia Regional Office (SEARO) and Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO), member states to WHO, addressed emerging infectious disease outbreaks and developed collective strategy which resulted

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<sup>25</sup> World Health Organisation (2020), how the four biggest outbreak since the start of this century shattered some long-standing myths, (April 02, 2022, 01:55 pm)

<https://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/ebola-6-months/myths/en/>

<sup>26</sup> World Health Organization (2020). Statement on the second meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee regarding the outbreak of novel corona virus (2019-nCoV), (April 02, 2022, 02:38 pm)

<https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-mission-briefing-on-covid-19--12-march-2020>

<sup>27</sup> Id.

<sup>28</sup> Sara E. Davies, National Security and Pandemics, United Nation Chronicle, (April 02, 2022, 03:00 pm)

<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/national-security-and-pandemics>

in the adoption of Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases (APSED) in 2005.<sup>29</sup> APSED works according to the principles of IHR “core public health capacities”. Thus, IHR is the only universal and comprehensive treaty on health, backed by WHO, with an aim to prevent, detect and respond to major disease outbreaks. The IHR revisions were adopted as **WHA Resolution 58.3**<sup>30</sup> in the year 2005, providing a robust framework for preventing, protecting against, controlling and providing a public health response to the international spread of disease.<sup>31</sup> According to **Article 50** of IHR, the review committee can make technical recommendations to the Director- General regarding amendments to IHR for its functioning. In response to COVID-19 WHO expected the review of the functioning of IHR in following areas<sup>32</sup>:

- (a) Convening of the Emergency Committee and its working modalities;
- (b) International Coordination and Collaboration for response;
- (c) Outbreak alert, verification, information sharing and communication;
- (d) Additional health measures in relation to international travel;
- (e) Implementation and reporting of IHR core capacities;
- (f) Examining progress made on the implementation of recommendation from previous review committees.

In response to COVID-19, it is the fourth time that a review committee has been established. Earlier it was established for the first time in 2010 during influenza pandemic; second in 2014 for national public health capacities and; third in 2016 during West African Ebola Outbreak.

**WHO plays an operational role** in the response to a disease and introduces better practices in international coordination around pandemics. In 1952, **Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS)**, created by WHO to monitor the origin of influenza virus. WHO also published influenza pandemic planning framework in the year 1999 to enhance the influenza surveillance, to develop speedy vaccine production and improve its emergency preparedness.<sup>33</sup> Then, **in 2003 the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network was formed** in response to controlling pandemics and in 2011, **WHO introduced Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP)**

<sup>29</sup> Id.

<sup>30</sup> World Health Organization, *Revision of the International Health Regulations, WHA 58.3, Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly (2005)*.

<sup>31</sup> Article 2, World Health Organization, *Revision of the International Health Regulations, World Health Assembly (2005)*.

<sup>32</sup> World Health Organisation(2020), *WHO Director- General’s opening remarks at the International Health Regulations Review Committee*, (April 03, 2022, 05:01 pm) <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-international-health-regulations-review-committee>

<sup>33</sup> World Health Organization (1999), *WHO/CDS/CSR/EDC/99.1 Influenza Pandemic Plan, The Role of WHO and Guidelines for National and Regional Planning (Apr. 1999)*, (April 03, 2022, 05:15 pm), [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/66155/WHO\\_CDS\\_CSR\\_EDC\\_99.1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/66155/WHO_CDS_CSR_EDC_99.1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

**Framework** for the sharing of influenza viruses and access to vaccines and other benefits. In 2020, the whole world is facing COVID-19 pandemic situation, WHO continues to spread co-operative prevention and preparation to tackle this crisis. The quarantine and isolation procedures have been adopted once again, travel bans have been imposed, international trade has been avoided etc. WHO plays important role in sharing effective national strategies across global networks. It ensured evidence based response to prevent the spread of virus and gave certain recommendations like avoiding unnecessarily interference with international travel and trade; supporting countries with weaker health systems; accelerating the development of vaccines; combating the spread of misinformation and rumours; identifying, isolating and preventing transmission; sharing data and knowledge across the world and working together in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation in order to defeat the outbreak.<sup>34</sup>

COVID-19 is a worldwide challenge and it requires a global response therefore role of other organisations are also important. Besides WHO, **International Labour Organisation** is trying hard to provide international guidance to manage this pandemic by ensuring safety of every individual and identifying short, medium and long term sustainable solutions. **International Labour Standards** (maintained by ILO) set up an equitable framework and incorporate resilience in front of tactile situation and it is also essential to a long lasting response to a pandemic. The Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendations, 2017 laid stress to adopt strategic approach to crisis response like stabilizing livelihood and income; promoting economic recovery; promoting sustainable employment; taking appropriate measures for socio-economic reintegration etc.<sup>35</sup> The recommendation emphasizes the importance of workers' and employers' in responding to pandemic situation. It particularly underlines the planning, implementing and monitoring measures for recovery and resilience. The ILO has structured its policy around four pillars for response to a crisis- stimulating economy and employment; supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes; protecting workers' in the workplace and relying on social dialogue for solutions.<sup>36</sup> Adherence to the contribution of International Labour Standards is a key to shaping the recovery and preventing a downturn in employment and labour conditions during and after the crisis.

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<sup>34</sup> World Health Organisation(2020), WHO Director- General's statement on IHR Emergency Committee on Novel Corona virus (2019-nCoV), (April 03, 2022, 05:25 pm)  
[https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-statement-on-ihf-emergency-committee-on-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-statement-on-ihf-emergency-committee-on-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))

<sup>35</sup> International Labour Organisation (2020), ILO Standards and COVID-19 (corona virus), (April 05, 2022, 05:53 pm)  
[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--norms/documents/generic/document/wcms\\_739937.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--norms/documents/generic/document/wcms_739937.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> ILO (2020), Understanding how the crisis affect the social market, (April 05, 2022, 06:20 pm)  
[https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS\\_739047/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_739047/lang--en/index.htm)

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only showed us the urgency of better knowledge sharing but also made us aware of the science for research and international cooperation. The United Nations scientific agency, **UNESCO** along with science ministers from 73 countries discussed the issue of pandemic and highlighted the need to better sharing of information and allowing free access to scientific data. The **UNOOSA programme UN-SPIDER** has been created in the fight against COVID-19 as it helps all countries to access the benefits of space application which provides unique solutions for improving global health and COVID response to tackle the pandemic. Besides this, **International Telecommunication Union** plays critical role in the collective response to COVID-19 which includes **Global Network Resiliency Platform (REG4COVID)** to ensure that the networks are kept resilient and telecom services are available to maximum extent.<sup>37</sup>

If we look at the past research of epidemics and pandemics like SARS, Swine flu or Ebola it has highlighted various issues which are relevant to the challenges currently being faced. Disease outbreaks, be it SARS or HIV/AIDS or influenza or novel corona virus, the poor and marginalised suffer the most and these outbreaks always expose the structural inequalities in societies. The COVID-19 pandemic has again raised vulnerabilities and resilience, severely affecting the indigenous people. But, UNESCO has responded swiftly to the pandemic. **UNESCO's International Bioethics Committee and its World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST)** released a Joint Statement where the increased vulnerability of marginalized group of people in times of crisis has been noted and collective responsibility has been taken to protect them from discrimination and stigmatization.<sup>38</sup> The countrywide lockdowns and quarantine procedures have exacerbated the education system as well therefore continuity of education must be ensured to all the children worldwide. To respond to this sudden education crisis, UNESCO set up an **Education Response Task Force** which created web platform with online learning and webinars focusing on remote learning. In addition to this, UNESCO has launched **Global Covid-19 Education Coalition** for protecting the right to education and to give technical assistance and capacity development to countries in the face of the unprecedented disruption.<sup>39</sup> Also, **the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)** transformed their many face-to-face courses into an online platform which deliver best

<sup>37</sup> United Nations (2020), *Covid-19 Response*, (April 05, 2022, 06:35 pm), <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/information-un-system>

<sup>38</sup> UNESCO (2020), *Indigenous peoples and the COVID-19 pandemic: A Global Review*, (April 07, 2022, 05:22 pm), <https://en.unesco.org/news/indigenous-peoples-and-covid-19-pandemic-global-overview>

<sup>39</sup> UNESCO (2020), *Global Education Coalition*, (April 07, 2022, 06:30 pm), <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition>

learning solutions to the beneficiaries.

As an immediate response to COVID-19 pandemic, the role of **CDC of USA** is also important for both public and health professionals as it aimed to protect America from health, safety and security threats. CDC is also providing with brief information of outbreak as well as protection advices for travellers. In case of such crisis, CDC plays an informative role to the countries which lack health professionals and advisory committees.<sup>40</sup> To cope with the pandemic, it is advised to take extra precautions and a self checker guide. CDC also provided useful information for health care professional like- evaluating and testing; infection control; clinical care guidance; optimize personal protective equipment supply etc.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, professional guidance and professional health care is extremely important to prevent chaos among individuals due to false and misguiding information.

The unprecedented disruption has not ended here as it has also triggered humanitarian, socio-economic and human rights crisis. The corona virus cases spread to over 215 countries and territories with 26,121,999 confirmed cases and 864,618 reported deaths.<sup>42</sup> Countries are now under high risks of health and nutrition services including immunization, antenatal and post natal care for pregnant women and many more. On one hand the pandemic is causing disruption in delivery of pregnant women while on the other hand many countries have suspended polio and measles campaign since the onset of pandemic. The United Nation and GAVI Alliance reported that approximately 80 million children are at risk of diphtheria, measles and polio due to disturbance in supply chains and immunization services.<sup>43</sup> The restrictions on domestic and international travel, curfews etc have constrained the movement of humanitarian supplies but despite these challenges, **UNICEF** and other agencies working hard to find innovative ways to cope up with this situation. UNICEF works in close coordination with **WHO** and in humanitarian situations it is guided by **Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action**. UNICEF's response to COVID-19 focuses under two main heads:- (a) public health response to reduce virus transmission and ; (b) continuity of health, nutrition, education, social protection etc; assessing and responding to the

<sup>40</sup> CDC (2020). Travellers Health Information, (April 07, 2022, 10:23pm)

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list/>

<sup>41</sup> CDC (2020), Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID 19) For Healthcare Professionals, (April 07, 2022, 10:30 pm),

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html>

<sup>42</sup> WHO (2020), Weekly Operational Update on COVID-19 (05 Sept, 2020), (April 07, 2022, 10:51 pm),

[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/wou-5-september-2020-approved.pdf?sfvrsn=91215c78\\_4](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/wou-5-september-2020-approved.pdf?sfvrsn=91215c78_4)

<sup>43</sup> GAVI, The Vaccine Alliance (WHO and UNICEF), 2020, (April 07, 2022, 11:10 pm),

<http://www.gavi.org/news/media-room/least-80-million-children-risk-disease-covid-19-disrupts-vaccination-efforts>,

immediate socio- economic impacts of COVID-19.<sup>44</sup>

Describing the outbreak as ‘health challenge for China and the rest of the country’, the three Rome-based agencies- **Food and Agriculture Organisation; International Fund for Agriculture Development and World Food Programme** offered support to the countries battling the novel corona virus. FAO is working to assist member countries and research communities in identifying potential host of the virus and reduce spill over effects to humans. It came in support of member countries to mitigate the pandemic’s impacts on their population’s food, security and livelihood. Under the concept of One Health approach FAO has been promoting increased awareness of zoonotic diseases and best practice to combat it.<sup>45</sup>

COVID-19 has major impact on global economy and employment therefore the role of **International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Bank and Regional Development Banks** are important. According to IMF, the global economy is expected to reduce by over 3 percent in 2020 which is the steepest slowdown since the Great Depression of 1930s and much worse than during the 2008-09 financial crisis.<sup>46</sup> The World Bank has forecasted that nearly 60 million people worldwide will be pushed into extreme poverty if the outbreak continues with the same pace.<sup>47</sup> According to the assessment of the **World Economic Forum**, for maintaining employment and financial stability, supporting SMEs and larger businesses is crucial. In India, the Finance Minister has announced “Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan Package” which is 10 percent of India’s GDP to provide relief to MSMEs.<sup>48</sup> There are other countries also which rolled out support packages. Therefore, on one hand, the World Bank is providing new financing to countries on a fast-track basis along with policy advice and technical

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<sup>44</sup> UNICEF (2020), Corona virus (COVID-19) Global Response, (April 07, 2022, 11:16 am), <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/covid-2019.html#2>

<sup>45</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United States (2020), UN food agencies offer support to China amid corona virus outbreak, (April 08, 2022, 02:14 pm), <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1259800/icode/>

<sup>46</sup> International Monetary Fund (2020), World Economic Outlook, April 2020: The Great Lockdown, (April 09, 2022, 02:47 pm), <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/04/14/weo-april-2020>

<sup>47</sup> Daniel Gerszon Mahler, Updated Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Global Poverty, World Bank, (April 09, 2022, 03:45 pm) <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty> ,

<sup>48</sup> The Indian Express, Explained: How COVID-19 has affected the global economy, May 16, 2020, (April 09, 2022, 03:39 pm), <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-has-covid-19-affected-the-global-economy-6410494/>

assistance, and on the other hand, the IMF is helping its member states with debt relief, emergency financing etc.<sup>49</sup>

The unprecedented crisis also addressing risks related to Artificial Intelligence and Robotics; big data and biotechnologies and the integrity of the supply chain therefore, to counter the impact of organized crimes and enhance tourism sector role of **United Nations Inter-regional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)** is crucial. It has the capacity to counter criminal groups and extremist and to strengthen resilience during pandemic.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, each organisation working to fight against this pandemic is clear and transparent in its approach and performing a key role in shaping the recovery and preventing disruption.



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<sup>49</sup> United Nations (2020), [COVID-19 Response](https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/information-un-system), (April 09, 2022, 04:15pm)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

The spread of corona virus is the most serious global crisis which requires global response. Having its origin with a few deaths in Wuhan, China the virus has sent shockwaves to the whole world as it is rightly said that 'disease knows no borders.' The WHO has reported more than 27 million cases of corona virus and approximately 900,000 deaths. The most important thing at this stage is national unity and regional and global solidarity. The pandemic has impacted nearly every community and disrupted economies and livelihood at global level and disproportionately impacted the most vulnerable. In the early 2020, the emergence and declaration of COVID-19 lead countries to enforce lockdowns and quarantine procedures. This measure affected majorly pre- planned events and activities at national and international level. This also affected the convening of CMP-15 and the promotion of IYPH 2020 which was declared by UNGA in 2018.

While COVID-19 is affecting human health across globe, it is also causing adverse effect to plant pests and diseases. Nearly half of the global population is dependent on plants and agriculture for primary source of income, the outbreak poses a threat to food production. The Emergency Prevention System for Trans-boundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases (EMPRES), established by FAO plays an important role in fighting against spreading trans- boundary animal diseases and plants pests. The pandemic has great impact on global food security as well. In March 2020, the Food Price Index was calculated which showed the global price dropped by 4.3 per cent due to demand contractions amid lockdowns and movement restrictions. The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) is seeking more information on transmission of virus via food traded internationally and it is advised to avoid the consumption of raw animal products.

The outbreak revealed the fragility of health systems in all the countries. It showed catastrophic effects on global economy, global health etc which resulted in human rights crisis. Due to quarantine and movement restrictions women and children are not safe as it increased the risks of gender based violence and discrimination against the marginalised groups. It also disrupted access to sexual and reproductive health services. In response to this, UN Women is providing up-to-date information and also analysing the importance of gender. On the other hand, UNFPA stands with those vulnerable women for their protection and health requirements during pregnancy.

To tackle COVID-19 it is essential for the international community to act in a coordinated manner. There are number of organisations working tirelessly to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. The developing countries in support with other countries, in the spirit of South- South Solidarity (UNOSSC) and global collaboration are taking lead and sharing successful COVID-19 containment, mitigation and social distancing measures. At the same time, medical doctors and nurses are working hard taking emergency response to rescue patients from fatality. States throughout the country has ordered schools, restaurants, business closure and enabled work from home structures. In compliance with social distancing directives, public transit services have also been reduced. But now the condition has been worsen and the world is again facing the similar situation which it had faced 101 years ago during the time of influenza pandemic. The historical accounts of 1918 pandemic and the novel corona virus pandemic have revealed that poverty, inequalities, vulnerabilities and weak health system creates the condition of transmission of diseases and exacerbates the existing health system.

Nonetheless, WHO along with other international and national organisations are working hard in response to the unprecedented crisis and they have made remarkable progress. Since the beginning, COVID-19 has been a priority for the WHO. Despite limited outpatient, inpatient, community based service platforms, emergency and critical service disruption WHO has provided that the best defence is strong health system and essential health services which can be strengthen in three ways: first, the continuity of essential services for immediate adjustments; second, building medium term response across society based on Health First approach and; third, implementing a specialized approach to service delivery for the vulnerable under Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

Now the countries have shifted from lockdowns phase to efforts to develop treatment and vaccines where 172 countries have potentially participated in COVAX<sup>51</sup> co-led by GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance; the Coalition for Epidemic Prevention Innovation which researches into vaccines and; the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria which is expertise in combating infectious diseases. By the end of 2021, COVAX is expected to deliver two billion doses of safe and effective vaccines. Also, the collaboration between Serum Institute of India, GAVI and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation ensured 100 million doses of vaccines at very low rate if it would be successful.

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<sup>51</sup> It is a global initiative which aimed at working with vaccine manufacturers to provide countries worldwide equitable access to safe and effective vaccines. It is currently the world's largest and *most diverse COVID-19 vaccine portfolio - including nine candidate vaccines, with a further nine under evaluation and conversations underway with other mayor producers.*

With the emergence of novel corona virus pandemic, there is a need to understand transmission patterns, immunity, severity and other risk factors of COVID-19. The government should continue to enforce social distancing measures and prohibit large gatherings in public places. From the economic point of view, countries need to coordinate with fiscal and monetary policymaking to tide over the crisis and lay the basis of growth revival. There is also need of universal healthcare and upgrading health centres. It is also important for every country to lift the lockdown, taking precautionary measures, to revive the economy. Considering the current global situation, it is highly required to have a long term strategy that balances the social, economic and public health benefits.

