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ANALYSIS OF IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 ON THE ENVIRONMENT- A BLESSING OR CURSE

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INTRODUCTION

Almost every element of human life from healthcare and economics to education and interpersonal relationships has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The environment is one subject that has attracted more and more attention. Significant changes in human behaviour and activities have been brought about by the broad closures and social isolation policies imposed in reaction to the epidemic, with both beneficial and negative consequences on the environment. Due to the extensive usage of personal protective equipment (PPE) and single-use items, it has also increased waste output and plastic pollution. However, the pandemic has cut greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution as a result of decreased industrial and transportation activity. The environmental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic shall be analysed, along with potential effects on the long-term sustainability of our planet.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

How Covid-19 Pandemic impacted the environment?

Early in 2020, as the epidemic reached a worldwide health crisis, various country responses, such as lockdowns and travel bans, significantly disrupted society, travel, energy use, and economic activity. This period is commonly referred to as the "anthropause."¹ Several beneficial effects on the environment brought about by human inactivity were seen with the start of the epidemic. Several beneficial effects on the environment brought about by human inactivity were seen with the start of the epidemic. Global carbon dioxide emissions decreased in 2020 by 6.4%, or 2.3 billion tonnes.² Nitric Oxide emissions decreased by up to 30% in April 2020.³ Lockdowns and other initiatives in China reduced nitrogen oxide emissions by 50% and coal usage by 26%.⁴ The European Union's "Next Generation EU" budget proposal and recovery plan, which aims to set aside 25% of EU expenditures for climate-friendly expenditure, included an investment of €750 billion over seven years.⁵ Nonetheless, the pandemic's reduced human activity distracted people's attention from ongoing issues like the Amazon rainforest's rapid deforestation⁶ and an uptick in poaching in some regions of Africa.⁷ Investment in green energy technologies may have halted as a result of environmental legislative obstacles and the global economic downturn.⁸

Effects On Air Quality

From March 25 to May 31, 2020, the entire country was placed under lockdown. The lockdown resulted in reported improvements in air quality and a decrease in air pollution, which was a relief for the environment.⁹ A significant decrease in air pollution was also seen in many Indian cities.

¹ 'Indianexpress', available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/anthropause-coronavirus-lockdown-human-animal-behaviour-6477255/>, accessed 12 February, 2023

² 'nature', available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00090-3>, accessed 23 February 2023

³ 'nature', available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-020-0904-z>, accessed 15 February 2023

⁴ 'heliyon', available at: [https://www.cell.com/heliyon/fulltext/S2405-8440\(20\)31808-9?_returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS2405844020318089%3Fshowall%3Dtrue](https://www.cell.com/heliyon/fulltext/S2405-8440(20)31808-9?_returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS2405844020318089%3Fshowall%3Dtrue), accessed 28 February 2023

⁵ 'southeusummit', available at: <https://southeusummit.com/europe/france/a-new-eu-rescue-fund-promises-solidarity-at-last/>, accessed 3 March 2023

⁶ 'nbcnews', available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/environment/deforestation-amazon-has-soared-under-cover-coronavirus-n1204451>, accessed 6 March 2023

⁷ 'abcnews', available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/conservationists-fear-african-animal-poaching-increase-covid-19/story?id=70118142>, accessed 6 March 2023

⁸ 'climate home news', available at: <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/04/01/cop26-climate-talks-postponed-2021-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/>, accessed 10 March 2023

⁹ 'nature', available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-83393-9>, accessed 14 March 2023

Even Gujarat, an industrial state on India's west coast, reported a notable drop in air pollution as a result of limits placed on industrial operations and transportation during the lockdown period. The average reduction in pollution emissions was between 51 and 72 percent, which caused a two-degree drop in average temperature during the lockdown. The megacities of Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, and Kolkata in India reported a 2°, 3°, 2°, and 2.5° Celsius drop in temperature, respectively.¹⁰ According to nationwide studies, the COVID-19 lockdown improved the water and air quality because air pollutants significantly decreased.¹¹ During the fourth lockdown period, known as "Janta Curfew," which ran from March 22 to May 31, 2020, emissions of pollutants that harm the environment, such as carbon monoxide, ammonia, sulphur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide, significantly decreased.¹²

Effects On Water Quality

The Indian government responded to the pandemic by placing the entire nation under complete lockdown. Even though people suffered socially and economically, studies found that the quality of the environment significantly improved.¹³ The River Water Quality (RWQ) metadata study revealed the urban-industrial area of Damodar's waterways has increased in quality because of a decrease in pollutants. The second investigation on Damodar in January 2021 found that the epidemic significantly altered the water quality and there was a large increase in the Water Pollution Index (WPI).¹⁴ The large increase in the WPI indicated that the water quality had improved as a result of the closure of heavy industries and the associated decrease in hazardous pollutants.¹⁵

The Ganga's water quality saw considerable changes, much like the river Damodar did. The shutoff of key industries and nationwide lockdown improved the quality of filthy creeks as well

¹⁰ 'Springer Link', available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10668-020-01034-z>, accessed 16 March 2023

¹¹ 'Springer Link', available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40710-022-00585-9>, accessed 15 March 2023

¹² 'National Center for Biotechnology Information', available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7580820/>, accessed 13 March 2023

¹³ Positive effects of COVID-19 lockdown on air quality of industrial cities (Ankleshwar and Vapi) of Western India, supra note 9

¹⁴ 'Environmental Engineering Research', available at: <https://www.eeer.org/journal/view.php?doi=10.4491/eeer.2022.144>, accessed 24 March 2023

¹⁵ 'Springer Link', available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10668-020-01152-8>, accessed 12 March 2023

as rivers. The amount of garbage entering some areas was cut by up to 50%.¹⁶ These analyses show that India's total lockup has resulted in a significant increase in water quality. Less sewage and wastewater were dumped into the waterways, which led to the modifications.¹⁷ This was most likely caused by the fact that Damodar was located specifically in an industrial region. Because of the lockdown, the industrial districts saw wildly divergent levels of activity, which had an impact on the outcomes of water quality tests conducted before and during the epidemic.

The research conducted in April 2020 on Vembanad Lake, India's longest lake, revealed that the concentration of suspended particulates fell by 16% during early lockdowns.¹⁸

Effects On Wildlife

Due to the epidemic in early 2020, fish prices and demand fell, and fishing boats all across the world were largely idle.¹⁹ The fish biomass will increase as a result of the drastic reduction in fishing, according to German scientist Rainer Froese, who predicted that some fish, like herring, might quadruple their biomass in European seas.²⁰ Many different animals have been seen wandering freely in cities. Scientists have seen significant changes in wildlife behaviour in Glacier National Park as a result of the dramatic decrease in human presence.²¹

Conservationists anticipate a sharp increase in bush meat poaching in African nations. The Nature Conservancy's Matt Brown stated there will be high rise of poaching when individuals have no other alternative for money, as we are already witnessing in South Africa.²² In contrast, Gabon made the decision to outlaw the consumption of pangolins and bats by people in an effort to control the transmission of zoonotic diseases.²³ SARS-CoV-2 is no longer believed to have been

¹⁶ 'frontiers' available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frwa.2021.603531/full>, accessed 26 March 2023

¹⁷ 'Nature', available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-99689-9>, accessed 11 March 2023

¹⁸ 'Science Direct', available at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969720325298?via%3Dihub>, accessed 19 March 2023

¹⁹ 'The Washington Post', available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/08/commercial-fishing-coronavirus/>, accessed 27 March 2023

²⁰ 'Bloomberg', available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-17/with-fishing-fleets-tied-up-marine-life-has-a-chance-to-recover>, accessed 28 March 2023

²¹ 'Washington State University Insider', available at: <https://news.wsu.edu/press-release/2023/01/19/low-impact-human-recreation-changes-wildlife-behavior/>, accessed 15 March 2023

²² 'abc News', available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/conservationists-fear-african-animal-poaching-increase-covid-19/story?id=70118142>, accessed 18 March 2023

²³ 'Newsweek', available at: <https://www.newsweek.com/eating-bats-pangolins-gabon-coronavirus-pandemic-1496329>, accessed 10 March 2023

transmitted by pangolins.²⁴ Myanmar began allowing the breeding of endangered species like tigers, pangolins, and elephants in June 2020.²⁵ It is feared that the Southeast Asian nation's efforts to decriminalise wildlife breeding and hunting could lead to the emergence of a New Covid-19.²⁶

Effects On Politics

The period was very critical and the reason was if countries concentrated on the pandemic, they would not be able to contribute domestically specified contributions, especially emerging countries with weak state capacities. As per Carbon Tracker, China shouldn't build any of the proposed coal-fired power plants because many of them will generate negative cash flow and end up as stranded assets.²⁷ During the epidemic, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the United States' Trump administration stopped enforcing a few environmental protection rules. If they can demonstrate that certain environmental rules were broken as a result of the epidemic, polluters are able to get away with breaking them.²⁸

A Blessing or A Curse

COVID-19 has caused enormous health, economic, environmental, and social problems, and has had a significant impact on the environment. Emergency measures have resulted in cleaner beaches, better air, and water quality, and reduced environmental noise. Reductions in transportation and industry have also reduced greenhouse gas and wastewater emissions, and the water quality of the Yamuna River has improved. Wild elephants roaming through the city of Wayanad, dolphins on the coast of Bombay, and peacocks walking in courtyards are blamed for the failure of COVID-19. The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on the waste industry, leading to increased hazardous and medical waste, single-use packaging, and increased organic and inorganic waste. To minimize possible health and environmental impacts, waste management should proceed as usual. The Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan, China

²⁴ 'Science Direct', available at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1567134820303245?via%3Dihub>, accessed 21 March 2023

²⁵ 'Down To Earth', available at: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/wildlife-biodiversity/myanmar-a-country-in-turmoil-emerging-as-key-transit-hub-for-wildlife-trade-report-86184>, accessed 24 March 2023

²⁶ 'Phys Org', available at: <https://phys.org/news/2020-07-tiger-pangolin-farming-myanmar-boosting.html>, accessed 27 March 2023

²⁷ 'Carbon Tracker', available at: <https://carbontracker.org/reports/political-decisions-economic-realities/>, accessed 29 March 2023

²⁸ 'The Guardian', available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/27/trump-pollution-laws-epa-allows-companies-pollute-without-penalty-during-coronavirus>, accessed 2 April, 2023

was the site of the COVID-19 epidemic, which highlighted the importance of protecting animal habitats. Unregulated animal trade can increase the risk of new viruses emerging, so open animal markets and international wildlife trade should be banned indefinitely. The beneficial effects of the pandemic on the environment are temporary and unsustainable, so the international community must focus on the effects of climate change and commit to action to respond to environmental challenges. One measure that can be taken now is the periodic cessation of all human activity.

Reducing sea traffic has helped the oceans recover from the effects of overfishing and climate change, according to a UN study. We realized that working from home is possible without reducing production. According to a Gartner study, 74 percent of CFOs plan to work from home permanently. Every year we were made to distinguish between necessities and luxuries. The world spent more time with these families than in confinement. People have developed strategies to keep their sanity while at home together, leading to an increase in innovation and old hobbies emerging as new obsessions. The paintings that had been started years before were finally finished while the old guitars were cleaned and tuned. The pandemic has made this year difficult because it has taught us how dependent we are on each other. Our food, health, and delivery networks are all interconnected. With a proper strategy for global economic recovery, which should focus on people and the environment, so that we can renew, restore and redistribute, we will finally overcome this disaster. Tropical forests, mangroves, and swamps are priorities for protection, according to a new study based on information from finance ministries and central bankers. This investment in protecting carbon-rich ecosystems will reduce the likelihood of future outbreaks of zoonotic diseases. The world remembers this lesson and passes it on to future generations through stories. It should also be a lesson for unborn children.

Ways to Protect the Environment Post-Covid

Putting people's immediate needs for shelter, food and welfare first should be our top priority. There are numerous chances and demands that need to be attended to when we make plans for a lengthy recuperation, making it challenging to decide what should come first. We have to explore these options. Ensuring that the government does not reduce its previously planned environmental targets is one of the best things we can do now. The oil and petrochemical industries have already devoted enormous resources to their pleas for further support and deregulation. Legislation that would, for example, ban harmful chemicals in common products or reduce methane emissions would not improve safety or advance the economy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a variety of environmental effects, some good and some bad. While some of the beneficial effects of the pandemic on the environment include the dramatic drop in air pollution levels, the recovery of wildlife, and cleaner waterways however, the rise in plastic garbage and the disruption of conservation efforts are grave issues that demand attention.

It is crucial that we take action to reduce the pandemic's detrimental effects on the environment while we work through the pandemic and make plans for a post-pandemic society. This entails lowering our reliance on throwaway plastics, enhancing trash disposal procedures, and maintaining financial support for environmental preservation initiatives. It's also vital to acknowledge that some of the changes the epidemic has prompted, like the rise in remote labour, could have long-term environmental benefits.

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought attention to how closely linked human and environmental health are. We must put sustainability first and approach problem solving in a more comprehensive way as we work to recover from the pandemic. Together, we can lessen our environmental effect, protect biodiversity, and create a more secure and sustainable future for both humanity and the earth.

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