



PANDEMIC PRESSURES: THE PROFOUND IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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ABSTRACT:

The COVID-19 Pandemic has profoundly impacted the Global South, exacerbating existing inequalities and exposing critical structural vulnerabilities. This paper strikingly illustrates the socio-economic and healthcare dimensions of the crisis in low- and middle-income countries, underscoring the disproportionate burden these nations are forced to bear. Limited healthcare infrastructure, constrained financial resources, and a high prevalence of informal employment have significantly amplified the challenges of managing the pandemic and mitigating its devastating effects. Economic disruptions, including sharp declines in remittances, trade, and tourism, have escalated poverty and inequality, demonstrating the inadequacy of existing social safety nets. Furthermore, vaccine inequity has impeded recovery in numerous regions, starkly revealing systemic disparities in global health governance. This analysis not only highlights the urgent need for action but also reveals how the pandemic has sparked innovative responses, such as localized solutions, digital transformations, and regional collaborations, which can serve as powerful models for future resilience. The findings of this study make it abundantly clear, addressing structural inequities and creating inclusive global frameworks is imperative to support the Global South effectively during crises.

KEYWORDS:

COVID-19 PANDEMIC, GLOBAL SOUTH, LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES, ECONOMIC DISRUPTIONS, INEQUALITY.

INTRODUCTION:

Since 2020, The COVID-19 pandemic and safety measures have disrupted billions of lives and jobs worldwide. Governments have created policies to reduce the impact. Crises like this show the need for strong welfare systems (Farnsworth and Irving, 2011; Starke et al., 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected the Global South, revealing profound inequalities in global health responses. Lockdowns and strategies that worked for affluent countries often proved ineffective for low-income nations, where a vast number of people depend on daily wages and informal jobs to make ends meet. These measures disrupted vital food supply chains, leaving millions at risk of hunger and exacerbating the struggles of the impoverished. In overcrowded urban slums and shared rural homes, practicing physical distancing and adhering to quarantine protocols became nearly impossible. Furthermore, the enforcement of lockdowns sometimes led to harsh police actions in countries like India, Nigeria, and South Africa, further compounding the crisis for vulnerable populations.

An effective response in the Global South must prioritize community-driven strategies, like case finding, contact tracing, and home quarantining, with active involvement from local resources and residents. Simple yet impactful measures—such as wearing masks, maintaining hand hygiene, and shielding vulnerable groups—are crucial for saving lives without disrupting livelihoods. It's essential to limit lockdowns, ensuring they are well-planned and incorporate community input. Enabling individuals to work and support their families is not just a necessity; it is

vital for their survival and the overall health of the community. Global health principles of equity and context demand policies tailored to the unique challenges of low-resource countries. Instead of relying on one-size-fits-all solutions, these nations must use local expertise and grassroots efforts to manage the crisis. At the same time, wealthy countries and global institutions should provide financial support, such as debt relief, to help the Global South recover sustainably.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF COVID-19:

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have varied across regions, largely depending on the economic structures of different countries and their exposure to external shocks. Countries that heavily rely on tourism, oil exports, and natural resources—such as South Africa, Nigeria, and Angola—have experienced the most severe impacts in the short and medium terms, primarily due to reduced demand and falling commodity prices. In contrast, countries with more diversified economies and less dependence on resources have demonstrated greater resilience. In Africa, the decline in global demand for key commodities like oil, minerals, and metals has adversely affected economies that are reliant on exports, including South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Similarly, in Latin America, the reduced demand for commodities such as copper and oil has impacted countries like Chile and Mexico. However, oil-importing nations in the Caribbean and Central America have benefited from lower oil prices during this time. (Alcázar et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic's containment strategies, including lockdowns, had widespread impacts, especially on vulnerable populations. While lockdowns helped reduce infections, they caused severe economic and social disruptions, particularly for informal workers and small businesses reliant on daily earnings. Prolonged restrictions set back progress in many sectors, disproportionately affecting those in urban slums and other marginalized communities unable to adhere to physical distancing due to crowded living conditions. These measures, though effective in some contexts, highlighted the unequal burden of the pandemic across societies. (Chowdhury & Jomo, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the informal sector and MSMEs across South Asia, leading to widespread job losses and economic instability. Lockdowns and restrictions on movement drastically reduced demand and market access, forcing many enterprises to shut down permanently. Millions of informal workers, including over a million in Nepal alone, have been left unemployed, highlighting the urgent need for relief and support to sustain livelihoods in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic has heavily affected key sectors in South Asia, including tourism, hospitality, manufacturing, and construction, leading to massive job losses. Tourism alone, which employed around 50 million people in 2018, has seen significant declines, impacting national GDPs—contributing over 9% in India, 7% in Pakistan, and 8% in Nepal.

THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF COVID-19:

The health impacts of COVID-19 in the Global South have been significant and varied, influenced by weak health systems and pre-existing challenges. Initially, Africa appeared to cope with the pandemic relatively well, experiencing fewer reported cases and deaths during the first wave. However, some countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, faced compounded health crises with outbreaks of Ebola and yellow fever. In Asia, outcomes varied; while some countries had early successes in controlling the virus, they later struggled to contain subsequent outbreaks. Latin America suffered severe health consequences, with high transmission rates and death tolls. Beyond the direct effects of the virus, the pandemic disrupted food systems, leading to increased malnutrition and food insecurity. This particularly affected children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. School closures exacerbated these issues by halting feeding programs that were vital for many children. Vulnerable groups, including indigenous communities, experienced disproportionate impacts due to limited access to healthcare and public services. Additionally, the pandemic threatened their cultural heritage through the loss of elders and ancestral knowledge. These varied impacts underscore the intersection of health, social, and systemic inequities in the Global South. The COVID-19 pandemic has made gender inequalities worse, especially for women in developing countries. Women, who are usually the main caregivers, have had to take on even more unpaid work due to

lockdowns, school closures, and other restrictions. This has made the gender gap wider, as women and girls do much more domestic work than men. The pandemic has also caused a rise in domestic violence, driven by financial stress, isolation, and lack of access to support services. In some countries, calls to domestic violence hotlines have increased significantly. Women are facing more challenges with work, caregiving, and safety, and many have fewer ways to get help or escape abusive situations.

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH:

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted mental health across the Global South, highlighting stark disparities in outcomes driven by varying local conditions and responses. In Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam, young people faced elevated rates of anxiety and depression, influenced by the severity of the pandemic and related stressors. Countries like Peru, with prolonged lockdowns and high mortality rates, recorded significantly higher anxiety and depression compared to Vietnam, which implemented shorter, localized lockdowns and had minimal fatalities. Economic challenges, including food insecurity in Ethiopia and health-related expenses in Peru, further exacerbated mental health issues. Protective factors such as strong parental and peer relationships varied across countries, reflecting cultural and structural differences. Women and individuals with pre-existing health conditions were particularly vulnerable. These findings underscore the critical need for context-specific mental health interventions that address economic stressors, strengthen social support systems, and prioritize vulnerable populations in the Global South. (Porter et al., 2021).

STRATEGIES FOR EQUITABLE AND RESILIENT OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT:

To manage future outbreaks more equitably, governments should focus on timely testing, tracing, and isolation to avoid broad lockdowns. Affordable and practical measures, such as reusable masks and modified public spaces, can help reduce transmission without severe economic consequences. Policies must be inclusive, offering targeted support to vulnerable groups and ensuring adequate planning, implementation, and enforcement to balance health objectives with social and economic needs. Adopting successful practices from regions like East Asia and Kerala could guide better transitions before, during, and after such measures.

Governments and international organizations implemented various measures to address the crisis, but these responses revealed critical lessons:

- **Global Solidarity:** The inequitable distribution of vaccines underscored the need for stronger global solidarity and mechanisms to ensure equitable access to healthcare resources.
- **Resilience Building:** The crisis highlighted the importance of strengthening healthcare systems, diversifying economies, and enhancing social safety nets.

- **Digital Divide:** The reliance on digital solutions for education, healthcare, and work emphasized the urgent need to bridge the digital divide in the Global South.

CONCLUSION:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed systemic challenges in the Global South, emphasizing the need for sustainable recovery plans, inclusive global cooperation, and reformed social protection systems. It highlights the importance of resource mobilization, operational capacity, and equity in policy implementation. The crisis calls for a revitalized development cooperation system with shared leadership between the Global North and South, ensuring timely financial support, debt relief, and long-term solutions that address economic and social vulnerabilities. Collaborative global efforts are essential to build resilience and create a fairer, more equitable response to future crises.

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