COVID-19 Crisis in the Developing Countries: Some Critical Areas to Address
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1.   Vaccination and the Developing Countries

Different developed countries have completed vaccination of a significant portion of their population against COVID-19. This is in addition to removing different kinds of restrictions (e.g., wearing masks, restrictions on public gathering, reopening of the academic institutions) and going back to normal activities in many cases. In contrast, different developing countries are still struggling with COVID-19, and most of them are yet to obtain the vaccine. In such a situation, the developing countries should take proactive roles to adopt different policy measures to address the problem. In this regard, the developed countries also must come forward to aid these developing countries that lack the needed resources to deal with a crisis like COVID-19. Without such consolidated effort, it would be challenging to address the crisis. Any delay in taking preventive and protective measures in developing countries may contribute to developing new variants of the virus through the mutation process, and the crisis may linger longer. Subsequently, the crisis can extend further to the vaccinated developed countries. A clear example is the spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19. Originally emerging in India, this variant is now causing the re-emergence of the crisis in different countries like Australia and the United Kingdom (Schraer, 2021; Mao, 2021). Thus, the apparent success of developed countries in tackling the virus could be short-lived if the crisis in developing countries is not addressed. Hence, both developed and developing countries should take initiatives to address the COVID-19 crisis in developing countries. In this regard, the following initiatives can be beneficial to address the vaccine crisis in developing countries:

1.1 Global Coordination and the Arrangement of Vaccine for the Developing Countries
At this stage, one of the main obstacles developing countries face is providing vaccines to their citizens. The COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiative is working to maximize the chances of participating countries to receive the vaccine. COVAX is an understanding of the different developed countries to provide vaccines to the developing countries, run by several

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international organizations, which include World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund) (BBC, 2021). Nevertheless, a limited number of developing countries have received the vaccine. Until June 11, 2021, only five countries received vaccines under the arrangement, including Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Fiji (BBC, 2021). Therefore, the initiative and its effectiveness are still minimal.

The vaccination issue becomes more complicated when some countries are using this vaccine allocation as their political tool to gain advantages in their geopolitics. This includes allocating the vaccines with various conditions, such as not taking the vaccines from the rival countries. Thus, this kind of 'vaccine diplomacy' makes the situation more complex. For example, the rivalry between China and India is affecting the vaccination of the different countries (Frazier, 2021). It is vital that countries with diplomatic agendas abandon any political biases in the time of crisis. Additionally, other developed countries should come forward to address this issue so that opportunistic countries cannot take advantage of the crisis. In this regard, the unused vaccine of a country can play an important role. A well-coordinated global effort can make the best use of such vaccines by giving them to different developing countries. Despite the efforts of a few developed countries, a more proactive and coordinated approach must be taken to ensure the best use of the limited valuable resources. The developing countries also need to voice their needs globally through effective foreign policy. These countries also need to allocate money to purchase vaccines, since vaccine donations from different developed countries may not be sufficient to vaccinate their entire population.

1.2 Building Trust on Vaccination

The availability of the vaccines alone may not be sufficient for a developing country. Many individuals of the different developing countries are unwilling to take the vaccine for different reasons. One of the major reasons for such unwillingness is associated with the fear of the possible negative side effects. These negative attitudes need to be addressed through proper educational policies, whereby the people become aware that the vaccine is essential to address the crisis. In this regard, the top political leaders may play an important role by endorsing the vaccine publicly. This may convince the general public that the vaccine may not have harmful elements. We can see such initiatives in different developed countries where the top political leaders of a government took the vaccine publicly, such as in the United States and Canada. However, taking such an approach in some developing countries may not

be possible as there is a strong belief that their top leaders have already taken the vaccine by arranging themselves. Hence, it is essential for such countries to implement additional mechanisms such as media campaigns, to develop trust in vaccination. They may at least engage local politicians to convince the general people, and those local politicians can also take the vaccine publicly to encourage the citizens. Otherwise, the valuable vaccine will expire without any benefit to those developing countries. We can see such wastage of valuable vaccines in different countries; for example, Malawi destroyed almost 20,000 doses of the AstraZeneca (AZ) vaccine as it could not administer the vaccines by their expiry date (Mwai, 2021a). One virologist of Malawi indicates that the mistrust of vaccines played a role in such an inability to use the vaccine within the expiry date (Mwai, 2021a).

1.3 Need for Proper Preparation for the Distribution and the Administration of the Vaccine
Many developing countries are not prepared for the management of the vaccine. They do not have facilities to store and carry the vaccine effectively. Hence, such developing countries need efficient and time-sensitive planning for such arrangements. They also need to provide training to their health workers to administer the vaccine. We can see that some developing countries cannot use their allocated vaccine because of such deficiencies. Mwai (2021 a & b) attributes the slow vaccination rate in African countries to the issues around distributing the vaccines due to poor transport networks, lack of health infrastructure, and staff to administer the vaccine. In addition, the slow approval of the vaccine by the government may also negatively affect the vaccination effort. For example, in South Sudan, the parliament was slow to approve the vaccine and delayed the training of the health workers in regards to the needed tasks (Mwai, 2021a). Similar situations have been observed in multiple developing countries.
Nevertheless, Bhutan is an excellent example among the developing countries which took effective strategies to vaccinate its population. This was seen as the first dose of vaccine was given to 93 percent eligible adults (people between ages 18 and 104) by April 8, 2021; this was accomplished within two weeks of the beginning of the vaccination program on March 27, 2021 (NPR, 2021). This rate was higher than many countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom and seven times higher than India's vaccination rate (Bagchi, 2021). The Bhutanese government established 1,200 centers across the country and distributed the vaccines by using cold-chain storage. The government also deployed 3,300 health workers and 4,400 citizens volunteers to roll out the vaccination program (NPR, 2021).

Additionally, helicopters were used to carry vaccines in the mountain areas, where it is not easy to carry the vaccine by road (Hanada, 2021). The other developing countries can learn from such proactive strategies of Bhutan, where a country with limited resources is effectively managing the crisis.

1.4 Vaccine Registration

Having a reliable vaccine management system can be helpful for developing countries. For example, a database can accurately document the number of vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Based on this database, the countries can provide vaccine certificates. In the future, this certificate can be essential to travel to other countries. In this regard, the countries with a national identity database are in an advantageous position as they can use such a database for the vaccine management system. For example, Bangladesh is using its national identity database for this purpose. However, the countries also need to be flexible in using such a database and the vaccine registration system. This is because, in different developing countries, people may not have official identification papers or may not be educated enough to register in the government system through the internet. The government should then arrange special provisions for undocumented and incapable people to register. In this regard, the example of Bangladesh can be helpful for other countries. To expedite the vaccination of the people, the country is providing the vaccine to garment workers without any registration (Daily Star, 2021). These workers are essential for the economic lifeline of Bangladesh.

2. COVID-19 in Developing Countries and Other Key Areas of Concerns

Along with the initiative to expedite the vaccination process, the developing countries also need to emphasize other protective measures, as it may take a long time to address the COVID-19 crisis by administering the vaccine. In this connection, some of such key important initiatives for the developing countries can be:

2.1 Addressing Religious People and Religious Practices

People from different religions may have different interpretations of COVID-19, as many of them believe that nothing will happen to them without God's will. This kind of interpretation may lead to different types of problematic practices such as not wearing masks, not maintaining physical distances, and arranging gatherings for religious activities. India, Iran, and other countries may face the surge of COVID-19 because of such examples of religious

gatherings (Baniamin, et al., 2020; BBC, 2020; Pandey, 2021a). In India, the authority allowed *Kumbh Mela*[1]*,* which led to a massive outburst of the virus (Pandey, 2021a). A similar outbreak was seen in the holy city Qom, Iran, due to a religious gathering (BBC, 2020).

Governments should engage religious leaders to educate people with the respective religion's logic to follow COVID-19 protocols. Without such engagement, it would not be easy to convince this category of people to comply with COVID-19 protocols. For example, to convince the Muslims, the Muslim religious leaders can use the religious practices and instructions, particularly the practices of the Prophet and his companions. One of such Prophetic instructions can be: 'If you hear about it (an outbreak of plague) in a land, do not go to it; but if the plague breaks out in a country where you are staying, do not run away from it' (Al Bukhari) (Farooqi, 2020). Instructions similar to the before-mentioned can be used to encourage people to follow lockdown and educate people that they should not be reckless and leave everything to fate. A government may also take the initiative to educate the religious leader to propagate the importance of maintaining COVID-19 protocols. In many cases, religious leaders may understand such necessity, but they remain silent as they earn from different religious gatherings. Governments need to encourage religious leaders to advocate for social distancing and avoid large gatherings. This will remove their incentive to stay quiet about the danger of the pandemic and for the promotion of different religious gatherings.

2.2 Smart Lockdown and the Support for Online Activities

If COVID-19 cases increase in a country, then that country will be forced to impose a lockdown. But as different developing countries have higher financial constraints, such lockdowns can have very severe impacts on the economy and the livelihood of the people of those countries. A smart lockdown can reduce financial loss by continuing the major essential activities to deal with this problem. In this regard, online business and online-based education can help enormously. To spread online business and education, the respective government can play an important role by supporting the transformation of these activities to online platforms. For this, the government can make available supporting facilities such as increasing the availability of internet connections and reducing the cost of the related equipment for online activities.

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[1] A religious festival where millions of people gathered and bathed together.

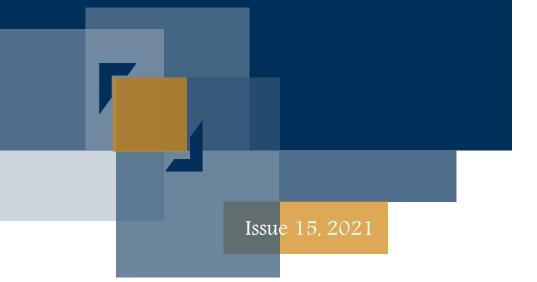## 2.3 Arrangement of Medical Support and Equipment

The developing countries can take initiatives to ensure minimum health facilities in different parts of the respective countries, particularly the arrangement of high flow oxygen supply and the regular cylinder-based oxygen supply. We can see that due to a lack of simple oxygen, people are dying in different countries, such as India and Nepal (Pandey, 2021b; Ethirajan, 2021). Along with the arrangement of oxygen supply, the countries can arrange for intensive care beds and ventilators. These are crucial elements to save lives during the surge of the COVID-19 crisis in a country. The governments of the different countries also need to train their health professionals to operate these equipment. Without such arrangement, if there is any surge of COVID-19 in a country, the situation can be devastating.

2.4 Social Protection and Support to Marginalized People

Due to COVID-19, and particularly due to lockdowns, many people lost their jobs, or their earnings were reduced significantly. To help these people, a country should provide social protection and support. Mobile phone-based banking is a great example of government support, as it can eliminate the middle layers and the associated problems in regard to accessing finance. This system can also help the respective person to obtain financial support instantly. Different developing countries like Bangladesh and India are using this kind of mobile banking to distribute the government's cash support. Nevertheless, the success of such types of initiatives also depends on the selection of the proper beneficiaries. If the right person is not selected, then such initiatives will not be effective.

2.5 Controlling Corruption

During the pandemic, different countries need to quickly procure necessities such as medical equipment and vaccination by relaxing the existing standard procurement process. This relaxation can open the opportunity for corruption as well. A study on COVID-19 and corruption indicates that individuals and corporations are taking advantage of the relaxed procurement rules for their benefits in collusion with public officials (Steingrüber et al., 2020). Such abuse can lead to wastage of scarce resources, have substandard drugs and equipment, and insufficient procurement. In most cases, both the developing and developed countries do not pay attention to the governance and anti-corruption matters in their COVID-19 management strategies. The authorities need to be cautious and control such corruption strictly. Otherwise, the countries will not get the desired outcomes from their investment, and such corruption can undermine the COVID-19 responses.

2.6 Promotion of Citizens' Initiatives

Due to resource scarcity, different developing countries have difficulties in dealing with a crisis like COVID-19. The engagement of the citizens of a country for crisis management can help to reduce such types of problems and lead to co-production. A study on Bangladesh indicates that people are using Facebook to connect and help each other address the crisis. These citizens-run groups are contributing to addressing the crisis in different ways, such as helping to locate suitable hospitals and to provide information about COVID-19 test, connecting people to get blood and plasma donors, arranging necessary medical equipment, particularly the oxygen cylinder, imparting medical advises through the provision of telemedicine, and providing cash help and jobs who lost jobs during the pandemic (Baniamin, 2021). To run their activities, they collect money through both online and offline platforms and make their activities public to ensure transparency and encourage others to join with their activities. As the groups' activities are through Facebook, other people can easily get involved with the activities, and the group can quickly expand throughout the country. With such success, governments should facilitate the development of communal groups and activities. An initial patronization and dissemination of the idea can work significantly in this regard.

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