

COVID-19: Socio-Economic Implications for Pakistan

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the global pandemic of COVID-19, its evolution, development and its implications on World and specifically Pakistan. Sparkly, it emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, was restricted to the city for less than a month, but currently the virus has engrossed the whole world. This part of study investigates both developed and developing countries responses to deal with the global dominant issue. The study focused on Pakistan's response to COVID-19 being damaged by War on Terror and political instability. The paper concluded that Pakistan very smartly responded to pandemic by applying smart lock down within its limited resources to contain the virus and maintained a balance between saving lives and saving livelihoods. This piece of paper also find that like on other developing countries the pandemic also has severe Scio-economic implications as it economically the business went down, investment came to its lowest level that heavily marked Pakistan economically unsound. Socially speaking, the virus created fear and totally break down the public gathering that made the people psychologically unhealthy.

Key Words: Covid-19, Pakistan, Pandemic, Scio-economic implications, China, Responses

Introduction

The COVID-19, first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, was confined to the city for less than a month, but as of now, the virus has gripped the whole world into its fold. Both developed and developing countries are striving to deal with the virus in an effective manner. According to NaohHarrari, the confluence of InfoTech and biotech has resulted into various challenges for the modern world. There are contesting claims as to how the virus emerged, but one thing is clear: the virus is real challenge confronting the modern world. The modern world has never been a place where there would be no event or phenomena making it busy and consuming the energy of people who inhabit it. Those events could be wars, conflicts, cultural wars, and many other natural or man-made events.

The history reveals that the Homo sapiens who inhabit the planet earth have confronted various natural and man-made events and hazards. But the response to deal with those events has never been similar as there were two categories of countries. Using the terminology of Karl Marx, states with dominant resources and states dominated by the states of first categories. In modern terminologies, these are developed and developing states. As for the earlier events, the same holds true for the COVID-19 as the response to cope with the virus has never been the same. The developed states are striving to protect lives, while the developing states are striving to save the sources of livelihoods. The virus first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan and as of now has impacted 3 million people around the world.

The speed with which the virus spread and given that it has high mortality rate, has baffled the whole world. Both developed and developing countries are striving to contain the virus and maintaining a balance between saving lives and saving livelihoods as the virus could be contained only through social distancing and other precautionary measures. The situation and the socio-economic impacts are grim for developing like Pakistan. It was only recently that economic activities were getting pace and the World Bank had upgraded Pakistan on Ease of Doing index. All these efforts would go in vain if the virus stays for indefinite period of time. The socio-economic impacts does portend a bleak picture. This research paper aims to bring to light the global response to the virus. The research also aims to bring about as to what it holds for the socio-economic landscape of the country. The research concludes with certain recommendation as to how the virus could be contained.

Theoretical Framework

The crisis ensued by the novel Corona Virus, which has been named as COVID-19 has also thrown novel challenges to the world at large. These challenges have been exacerbated sometime through policy failures; sometime through mismanagement and other times, unable to implement the precautionary measures needed to contain the virus. The resultant crisis has exacerbated the socio-economic problems of many countries in a substantial manner. There are various theories which could be used to explain as to what portends the virus for the future of the world. Some of these theories are as follow:

First, there is the theory of Boom and Bust cycle which is used in the economics to explain that a booming economy is always alternated by a bust cycles where the economy get stagnated. If we contextualize this theory in historical perspective, this has been a bona fide phenomena. The world economy has had to face various challenges which have impacted the course of economy. The theory finds its theoretical expression in the writings of Marxism who viewed that boom and bust is the integral part of the capitalist economy. The theory could also be contextualized in the context of Pakistan. The economy of Pakistan has also faced with boom and bust cycle driven by various major events. In the existing situation, it is the COVID-19 which has led Pakistan to face the bust cycles in the long run. Prior to that Pakistan was experiencing a boom cycles triggered by bold policy measures at different levels. The International Financial Institutions also prognosticated the better economic prospects. The bust cycles and the resultant socio-economic crisis will confound the challenges to Pakistan

Secondly, there is the theory of World system theory propounded by Immanuel Wallerstein. The theory posits that the structure of the world is such in which there are discrepancies in terms of various factors. The theory posits that there are three category of states in the world. First, there are core countries which have highly developed economic and political structure. Secondly, there are periphery countries which have all the characteristics opposite to that of the core countries. In-

between, there is a third category, which have the system better than the periphery but nonetheless less good than the core countries. The theory of World system could be used to explain the response of different countries to counter the crisis erupted by the COVID-19. While the core countries like the USA, UK, China with highly developed facilities are coping with the virus in an effective manner and they have the capability to deal with the virus, the periphery countries like India, African countries, Afghanistan, India and others are finding it hard to contain the virus given that they have limited capacity to do so. Thirdly, the theory of liberalism could be used to explain the global dynamics at play which have impacted the efforts to fight off the virus. At the time, when there ought to be better cooperation among the states, there is rivalry and blame-game. The theory of liberalism posits, that there ought to be cooperation between the states for the better world. In the present case, it is the COVID-19 crisis which demands earnest cooperation on the part of various countries to deal with the virus in an effective manner.

Covid-19

The Corona-Virus which is a strain of virus which impacts the respiratory system of human body. The virus is scientifically known as COVID-19. The virus impacts the respiratory system of human body with weak immune system. The symptoms include persistent cough, bleeding while coughing, flue, and breathlessness and in the most severe cases causes death. According to the scientific research the virus is asymptomatic in most cases. Therefore, those without visible signs of the symptoms could be the carrier of the corona-virus.

First Emergence of the Virus

The virus first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in the Hubei province in late December 2019 (Bryner, 2020). The Virus is caused by SARS-COVID-19. There are multiple and sometimes conflicting theories as to what caused the outbreak of the virus in the Chinese city. China claim that the virus was possibly brought to the city by the American military. While the USA claims that the virus was triggered by the presence of a wild market in the Wuhan city (Shayan Sardarizadeh and Olga Robinson, 2020).

Pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO)

After the investigations carried out by the WHO at the request of the Chinese government, the WHO declared the virus to be public health emergency in January 2020. After the number of cases were reported in different countries, the WHO declared the virus as pandemic on 10 March 2020. Since then the virus has been spreading relentlessly across the world.

The world health body is at the forefront to fight off the novel diseases. The body also received criticism for the USA for its dereliction to deal with the problem in proactive manner from the very outset (Coronavirus: What is a pandemic and why use the term now?, 2020).

The Global Response to Contain the Virus

The response to deal with the virus and contain it has never been the same. The discrepancies in approaches to deal with the problems stem from the structure of the world where a few developed countries are able to deal with the issues in an effective manner given that they have developed health infrastructures. While on the other hand the developing countries are grappling with the challenges of a how to maintain the balance between saving lives and livelihoods (Global Response to the Corona Virus). In order to contain the virus, states around the world have taken action which are meant to stem the tide of the virus. In this regard, the global travels industries have come to halt. Many of the economic activities have been stopped.

Pakistan's Response to Contain the Virus

The first case of the corona-virus was reported in Pakistan in mid-February. From the outset, Pakistan could not assess the gravity of the situation. Once the Taftan fiasco happened, there was proliferation of reported cases in Pakistan. Pakistan failed to formulate a coordinated and unified policy in sync with the cooperation of the provincial government. The failure of the policy was the business-as-usual politics in Pakistan which is characterized by blame-game and polarized politics. The central and provincial government and particular the Sindh government are at cross-purposes to deal with the problem in as effective manner as would have been desirable. The situation has further muddied but the lack of the health infrastructures to deal with the problem in effective manner (Saad, 2020).

Impacts of the Virus

No area of human life has been bereft of the impacts of the virus. Beginning with individual life which is confined to home to interaction at global level has been impacted by the virus (The global economic effects of coronavirus, 2020). The deadly virus is fast spreading its tentacles around the world with the number of reported positive cases is rising in each country.

Socio-Economic Impacts

The COVID-19 has impacted Pakistan unemployed in number of ways. Two aspects are very necessary in the regard. The first has to do with the layoffs. With the economy closed, there would be layoffs in the major industries. Secondly, the new employment opportunities for already frustrated youth populace has been closed down. And thirdly, the labor class has been unable to work on daily wages. These factors will create a situation of unprecedented proportion in the country. The unemployment rate will also have disproportionate impact on the basis of gender. The women would be worst hit. The IMF has already predicted an increase in the unemployment rate of to 6.2% up from the 6.1% for the year 2020. The Federal minister for planning and development has estimated that the recession caused by the COVID-19 will cause almost 18 million job losses in the country (Rana, Coronavirus forecast to render 18.5m jobless in Pakistan, 2020).

The Menace of Poverty

With increase in the unemployment rate and the resultant increase in the inflation, the issue of poverty will increase. According to the Economics survey, 2020 report, Pakistan made a stride to bring down the poverty to 24% in Pakistan, though there is disparity on the basis of regions. The issue of poverty is more severe in the rural areas than in urban areas. If the Multi-dimensional aspect of poverty is taken into account, the issues of poverty will exacerbate the socio-economic crisis of Pakistan in substantial manner (Shah, 2020).

The situation at global level is also worrisome. According to the World Bank estimates, the Covid-19 will put the lives of many reeling for the worst socio-economic crisis. The crisis will put almost 50 million at the cusp of being poor. The presence of poverty in any society is always a threat-multiplier as it triggers a conducive environment for growth of various social problems like extremism, child labor, and decline in human productivity, malnutrition, low HDI, etc. (Shah, 2020).

The issue of Inequality

The COVID-19 will also lead income inequality. The existing inequality will persist and the scope of inequality would extend to cover many people. The rise of inequality is the byproduct of contracting economy. The affluent class in the society will be able to overcome many challenges caused by the COVID-19. However, the middle and lower classes will be impacted. In such a situation, there will be increase in the income inequality (Davide Furceri, Prakash

Loungani, Jonathan D. Ostry, Pietro Pizzuto, 2020). The COVID-19 is not only a health crisis, it is also threat multiplier in terms of increasing the hardship of millions of poor people. The Economic disaster unleashed by the COVID-19 has challenged the prevalent economic models. This is the reason that the UNDP calls for universal incomes so that the inequality could be contained.

Burden on the Health Infrastructure

Pakistan spends a meagre portion of its total GDP on the Health services. According to the economic survey report 2018-2019, Pakistan spends only 0.4% of its GDP on health. Given that it would not be surprising that the health system has become burdened with many cases where it is not able to cope with the rising cases (Ebrahim, 2020). Pakistan also has one of the least availability of doctors, nurses, beds and hospitals. According to the WHO report, there is only 9.8 doctors for 1000 patients. The system will get burdened to the extent where it would require a foreign support to buttress its ability to cope with the rising cases. The staff which is dealing with the virus also have complained of the lack of equipment's. Hence, the Coronavirus will impact the health infrastructure in Pakistan (Ebrahim, 2020).

Impacts on the Disadvantaged Groups

The disadvantaged groups in the society like Children, Labors, women and minorities would be severely impacted by the socio-economic impacts. Given that these people are already at the receiving-end of every kind of issues, these problems would be worse confounded. Children though have not been impacted as much as their adult counterpart by the covid-19, but the challenges of restricted movement and the burdened on the health infrastructure have created various problems for this category of people. The normal vaccination measures for the viral and infectious diseases like polio, measles, etc. have been restricted. According to the UNICEF report, the younger generation have been impacted through the pandemic. According to the same report, 60% children are inhabiting the countries where there is partial or full-fledged lockdown. In such a situation, the younger generation would be the hard-hit because of their enfeebled immune system. The pandemic also has resulted in the halt of various sanitation services thus exacerbating the fear of spreading water-borne diseases in the country. The most worrisome aspect is that of schools. The closure of institutions impacts the well-being and the human capital in enormous manner. Pakistan already has 23 million out of school. In such a situation, the future of the children looks bleak as they would be unable to complete their education. The vaccination drives which have been halted will trigger a new crisis of unprecedented level confined not only to Pakistan but to the whole of South Asian region according to the UN report (Janjua, 2020).

Likewise, the problems of the labor have been increased. The daily wages are the receiving end of the crisis unleashed by the covid-19. Labor in both formal and informal sectors have been hit by the COVID-19. In many countries, the spread of the COVID-19 has been associated with a particular ethnic, religious minorities. This has resulted into their characterization, marginalization and ultimately their racial profiling. Such attitude has exacerbated the problems of the minorities (Bryan Balvaneda, M.A., Elizabeth Roemer, PhD., Sarah Hayes-Skelton, PhD., Amelia Yang, B.S., and Anna Ying, M.A., 2020).

The health crisis and the concomitant economic disaster has also created various problems for women folk in society. In the country like Pakistan where the contribution of women is what which leaves a lot to be desired. The education status, unemployment are what characterize women in Pakistan. In such a situation, there is also feminization of poverty in Pakistan. The crisis

unleashed by the virus in different spheres of life would impact women the most (The impact of COVID-19 on women, 2020).

The Human Development Index (HDI)

Since independence, the HDI situation has been grim in Pakistan. Recently, the UNDP report titled as “Beyond Income; Beyond average; Beyond today: Human inequalities in the 21st century” has put Pakistan at 155 position out of 189 countries with low HDI ranking. The socio-economic created through the COVID-19 will impact Pakistan ranking on the HDI (Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today, 2019). Similarly, the Covid-19 will also impact the Sustainable Development Goals’. Pakistan failed to complete many of the targets envisaged through the MDG’s. The crisis of the virus will impact Pakistan efforts to meet the same targets in the years to come (Erna Solberg, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, 2020).

Economic Impacts

It is the economy which would suffer a lot through this pandemic. Pakistan was experiencing a growing economy. In recent years, Pakistan took various initiatives to bolster its economic status. However, these efforts will go in vain due to emergence of the COVID-19. It will impact the economy of Pakistan in a number of ways. These are as follows:

General Aspects of the Economy

A Stagnated Economy

The COVID-19 has shackled the developed economies of the world. Countries around the world are grappling with challenges of maintaining a balance between protecting lives and protecting livelihoods. With global contraction of economies, trade and the free flow of capital, labor and services, the developing countries would be at the receiving-end of such contraction and its resultant fallout. In the context of Pakistan, it is estimated that the GDP growth would come down to 1.5%. In such a situation, there will be many challenges of Pakistan in different realms as a booming economic coincide with prosperity in each sector.

The Balance of Payment Crisis

With global travel in place, there will be a decrease in global trade. With restricted global trade, the balance of payment crisis of the country will increase. It was only recently when Pakistan was in the throes of getting out of the Balance of payment crisis. The decline in exports will impact Pakistan current account deficit. However, the brighter aspect is Pakistan a relief measure from the IMF. Under the relief measure the IMF approved \$1.4 billion for Pakistan (Jamal, 2020).

The Loss of Human Capital

Unlike the past natural or man-made hazards or events, which caused damages to the physical aspects of human lives, the corona virus will impact the human productivity in the long run. Many of the skills the people have would go in waste as there would be no industries to provide them jobs in chime with their relevant skills. Also one of the worrisome aspects of the Pakistan is that the Human capital is squandered due to faulty education system and the stagnated economy (Erna Solberg, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, 2020).

The Issue of Fiscal Deficit

With increase in the expenditure driven by socio-safety net and other relief packages and with no activities to generate the taxes require, there will be increase in the fiscal deficit. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has predicted the loss of 300 billion in the last quarter year due to the COVID-19. In such a situation, the increase in the fiscal deficit cannot be ruled out. The statistics shows that the fiscal will reach to as high as 9.2% of the GDP (Rana, Pakistan's budget deficit may hit record high due to coronavirus, 2020).

Burden on the Social Safety Net

The socio-economic crisis ensued through the COVID-19 will bring about the situation where many people would be in the need to receive the social support. The government of Pakistan has already announced various relief packages for the different sectors. The Covid-19 will burdened the social safety net. The government of Pakistan has announced the package of 1.2 trillion which are to be disbursed through the Ehsaas portals. Such a situation will create burden on the social safety net as there will be increase in poverty in other social problems which would require support through social safety net (RUTKOWSKI, 2020).

Impact on Major Industries, Service Sector

The COVID-19 also has impacts various major industries. The productivity of various industries has been impacted. The COVID-19 has impacted the major industries and the service sector in a number of ways. First, to maintain the necessary social-distancing, the government has urged to contain the virus by maintaining necessary social-distancing and minimum necessary labor, this has resulted into the layoffs of workers (Rahman, 2020).

The Issue of Food security

The COVID-19 has not only resulted into health crisis, but the resultant measures lockdown have impacted the supply chain both at global and domestic level. The lockdown measures have resulted into the disruption of supply chain both at domestic and global level. Pakistan though is self-sufficient in many production, though their disruption will create problems for the community already suffering from the severe consequences of the COVID-19 and the resultant social-economic problems (Food Security and COVID-19, 2020).

Impacts on the CPEC project

The impacts on the CPEC project could be contextualized in terms of global contraction of economy and restricted travels. The COVID-19 and the resultant consequences for the economy will impact the CPEC project in a number of ways.

Decline in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

It was only recently when Pakistan was witnessing increase in the Foreign Direct investment. Such an increase was the result of improved security situation in the country. It was also the offshoot of the CPEC project as various countries were encouraged to invest in Pakistan. Pakistan also achieved a milestone in terms of Ease of Doing Business Index for the year 2019. Such developments portends better for the economic prosperity of the country in the long run. However, the COVID-19 and the resultant restriction in global trade and restricted flow of capital, service and labor has impacted the CPEC project and it has led to a decline in the FDI. Given that CPEC project is largest project involving foreign direct investment, it will decrease its pace (Saleem, 2020).

Slower Pace of Work

The CPEC project which otherwise was going with full-throttles has come to halt due to the spreading tentacles of the COVID-19. The government has imposed lockdown in the country where social-distancing has been termed as the only way to deal with the virus as no vaccine has been developed to contain the virus. Until the vaccine is developed, the precautionary measure like social-distancing can contain the virus. However, the social-distancing has also been in play in the case of construction industry. In such a situation, the construction industry has come to halt which in the long run impact the CPEC project and the result would be that in the process many of the projects associated with the CPEC project could not be completed on fast-track basis (Saleem, 2020).

CPEC in the Context of Global Dynamics in the time of COVID-19

The virus first emerged in China. This aspect has resulted into the racial profiling of the Chinese people. Not only that, several of the projects associated with China have come under severe scrutiny. The CPEC project is no such exception. The USA and China are engaged in many ways in a tug of war so that to bolster its position in the world at large. The CPEC project was already an eye-sore for many countries. The COVID-19 has thrown such things into a sharp focus (Saleem, 2020).

The Way Forward

It is a fact that the pre-COVID-19 and Post-Covid-19 world will be different in terms of various factors. The situation as has been prognosticated would be worse than today. Therefore, there ought to be various initiatives which could forestall the bad effects of the virus. For that purpose various initiatives are to be taken. Some of these are as follow:

Global Cooperation

One of the best ways to deal with the COVID-19 is global cooperation. It must be at two levels. At first level, there ought to be concerted efforts to defeat and root out the virus. Secondly, after the virus has been eliminated, there likely to be various socio-economic problems for the poorer countries, in such a situation there will be cooperation to deal with resultant socio-economic problems. The enormity of the challenges in the post-COVID-19 world would demand greater cooperation among the countries (Islam, 2020).

Say No to “Blame Game”

The virus also has brought about the specter of racism where a particular community, religious groups are held culpable for spreading the virus. For example, at global level the USA deems the virus as Chinese virus and held the China for the spread of the virus. Similarly, in many countries around the world a particular group is held responsible. For example, in India the Muslim community is held responsible for the spread of virus in India. Such kind of attitude runs the risk of further increasing the virus rather than alleviating its spread. Therefore, there ought not to be any blame game among different stakeholders.

Assistance to the Developing Countries

Once the virus is eliminated, its socio-economic impacts will expose the deficiencies of various developing countries. Given that global economies are interconnected, it does not augur well for the global economy at large. Therefore, the International Financial Institutions (IFI's) and the developed countries must come with relief packages for the developing countries so that it could cope with post-COVID-19 situation in effective manner.

Better Coordination among Various Stakeholders

One thing is evident when we look at the global efforts to cope with the COVID-19. At global level, many countries are at cross-purposes to deal to contain the virus. At domestic level, various governments are grappling with challenges to deal with the virus in uniform manner. The USA and many other developed countries are faced with such kind of situation. Pakistan is no exception in this regard. From the get-go, Pakistan has faced the challenges of dealing with the virus in an effective and uniform manner. The provinces and the central government are not in unison in their approach to deal with the COVID-19. Such kind of contradictory approach does not bode well for the overall efforts to cope the virus in an effective manner. Hence, there ought to be better coordination between countries in case of global level and between various administrative units in the case of domestic level.

Precautionary Measures at Different Levels

The long-term solution to deal with the virus has been the development of vaccine. However, until the vaccine is developed certain Precautionary measures ought to be taken to contain the virus. In this regard, the use of various sanitization strategies have been put forward by various forums.

Harnessing the Potential of Youth

Pakistan is one of those countries where youth constitutes more than half of the population. Given that the potential of youth could be harnessed to deal with the virus in an effective manner. The UNDP is at the forefront to harness the potential of youth in this time of crisis.

Conclusion

When one person falls ill, it is called disease; when more than one person got the disease, it is called the health issues; when many of the people get the disease in such a manner that it get spread within a particular region or locality, it is called the epidemic; while the disease which spread over a large areas and impact the large number of people, it is called the pandemics. The COVID-19 is pandemic which was declared so by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 10 March 2020. The COVID-19 has created various problems in individual, social, political and economic level. The aftermath of the COVID-19 is more severe at the socio-economic level. These consequences are evident not only at domestic level, but at the global level too. But these problems have confounded the already stressed system of the developing countries. Pakistan is no such exception to such a scenario. Since the first case was reported in Pakistan, there has been ambivalence on the part of those who are involved in the policy formulation. First, there is discrepancy over as to how to deal with the problem in an effective manner. The lack of coordination stems from the peculiar politics of Pakistan where the ego of politician more matter than the issue of public importance. This is the reason that the number of reported positive cases are rising in Pakistan at exponential rate.

The most significant impact of the COVID-19 would be conspicuous in the socio-economic aspects of the country. The socio-economic status of the country presented a gloomy picture even prior to the virus emerged in the country. The confluence of various factors like stagnated economy, and the lack of social budgeting and the lack of investment in the important sectors like education, and health infrastructures resulted into Pakistan placement on the Human Development Index at bottom place. In the crisis in the aftermath of the COVID-19 there are likely to be further decline. In this regard, the emergence of various social problems in the country cannot be ruled out. The socio-economic like the unemployment, poverty and inequality would increase in many developing countries like Pakistan. Many reports of the United Nations development program evince this fact. The socio-economic problems of the disadvantaged of the society will increase. The confluence of all these will impact the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking of Pakistan.

The general aspect of the economy like economic growth, balance of payment of crisis, fiscal deficit are not devoid of the impact of the COVID-19. The predications made by many of the financial institution of the portends a bleak economic landscape. Pakistan was already undergoing through a stagnated economic period. Such a scenario will further lead to a stagnated growth rate. The CPEC project although is to be less impacted but it will be impacted in two ways. First, with restricted global travels there will be decline in the foreign direct investment (FDI). Secondly, due to restricted flow of labor, capital and service the pace of the work is to be impacted. Given that the COVID-19 will bring about transformation in each sector of state. Many believe that change will be there, but how that change could be, no one knows. Many predicts a bleak and a worst transformation. However, to avoid such a scenario a number of steps ought to be

taken both at global level like deep coordination, cooperation, relief measures, social distancing and harnessing the potential of youth. These steps are more needed for the developing countries. Only through a holistic and coordinated and concerted efforts the worst could be forestalled.

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