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Corona Pre-Crisis Stage: What Could We Have Done Differently?

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Corona Pre-Crisis Stage: What Could We Have Done Differently?

Crisis management as described in the literature is all about dealing with the threat to ensure, first and foremost, public safety. It is divided into three phases: a pre-crisis phase, a crisis response phase and a post-crisis phase. The question raised here is what could have been done differently during the pre-crisis phase. Could we have prepared better before the Corona-virus pandemic? Everyone is asking themselves the same question, now, after the fact. No one would appreciate those who come after a crisis, or even during a crisis, and cannot resist saying, "I told you so!" However, the positive element in the recollection is that we can derive lessons learned, so that if, and only if, we survive this current crisis, we can do a better job next time. In both developed and developing countries, there were a lot of possible pre-crisis measures that could have led to a better level of preparation, if not prevention, but that unfortunately went unheeded.

In developing countries, some of the possible pre-crisis measures could have been:

- *Ensuring more equitable budgetary allocations to civilian needs compared to military equipment and expenditures*, and ensuring transparency regarding the magnitude of military allocations: In many countries the military budget is considered separate from the national budget, and all items therein are totally classified.
- *Guaranteeing fair budgetary allocations to the health sector*: The poor compensation of physicians and nurses in developing countries resulted in a massive brain drain phenomenon and a significant deficit in needed qualified health personnel. Increasing numbers of physicians, as soon as they are done with their publicly funded medical education, start seeking job opportunities in the developed world.
- *Building Trust between the government and citizens* so that when a message goes out during the pandemic, there is faith and confidence. Building trust of course takes time and depends on many factors including delivering on promises, transparency, and displaying real commitment by government to ensure a good quality of life for citizens.

Meanwhile in the developed world, some of the portfolios that could have been better handled include:

- *The migration portfolio*: Instead of dealing with migrants as the enemy, "building walls," toughening border security and assuming that this would be for the national good, there should have been better attention directed to resolving problems in the sending nations. All that was needed was a recollection of the simple truth that problems, especially diseases, poverty and hunger, do migrate and cross over any wall regardless of its height.
- *Greater research cooperation and transparency between developed countries and less competition*: Sharing research in vaccine development may create synergies and materialize in real benefits for humanity. The competition wars between pharmaceutical companies, the patent policies and the trade wars, such as between China and the United States, are not what we all need.
- *Heeding early warnings about the pandemic*: Some say warnings were voiced early on by researchers in China and the United States about the possible hazards of an eminent pandemic. What we now learned is that the Chinese scientist, Li Wenliang, who first alerted the world about the presence of a new Corona virus was silenced, and later died from the pandemic at the early age of 39. Other reports say that possibly President Trump may have been alerted about the virus in November 2019, two months before his announcement in January 2020 that, "We have it totally under control." He believed that it was not serious enough and therefore did not give sufficient time for hospitals and healthcare centers to get prepared.
- *The allocation of official development assistance (ODA)*: Currently ODA gets to be allocated to the areas and sectors where there is proven direct and tangible benefits to both the donor and recipient. Meanwhile support is relatively limited to sectors where the recipient country needs

are more pronounced. This includes relatively inadequate cooperation in building the health sector and the health capacities in developing countries. Developed countries, like the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom, recruit health professionals who were educated for free in their home countries, and deprive the developing countries of a much needed and scarce resource.

- *Building better early disease prediction capabilities:* In March President Trump was asked about his predictions for how the coronavirus pandemic will progress in the United States and he was quoted saying, “We don’t have a forecast, because we don’t know.” Accusations now are appearing related to how the Center for Disease Control and Prevention was subjected to budget cuts since 2018 and how a global health security team was dismantled in the same year.
- *Directing more funding to the World Health Organization* to enable it to carry out its different programs and achieve its vision of improved health worldwide.
- *Prioritizing the health and well-being of citizens over political goals:* Despite all what is happening, we still find a political agenda behind the actions of some top leaders, like wanting to get more air time on T.V. to guarantee more votes, or distributing assistance packages in person, as a populist move.

Hopefully, next time around we will do better.