

Development Cooperation in the International Response to COVID-19 and Efforts to Advance Health Security

What are the continuing effects of the coronavirus pandemic on development?

The pandemic is having a devastating impact on the lives of the poor and disadvantaged throughout the developing world.

- The still growing toll of more than 140 million cases of COVID-19 and more than three million deaths has disproportionately affected poor and vulnerable people who lack access to public services to prevent or treat this infection or to mitigate its spread. The risk of additional outbreaks, including of new variants, is an ongoing threat to public health.¹
- The pandemic has caused massive losses of employment and income, especially by workers in the informal economy, low-paid wage earners, and migrant workers. The World Bank estimates that the number of people living in extreme poverty will increase between 119 and 124 million, reversing a 20-year trend that had reduced poverty by more than one billion people.²
- The negative economic impact on individuals and families has been accompanied by harmful social disruption and growing inequality. The pandemic has contributed to a dramatic increase in children who have left school, violence against women and girls, forced movement from urban to less costly rural environments, and criminal exploitation of the most vulnerable.³

The pandemic has also amplified and, to varying degrees, has accelerated preexisting negative trends in governance and respect for human rights.

- It has deepened a trend toward autocratic government and polarized politics, including by providing authoritarian leaders with a pretext for measures to

¹ World Health Organization, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, <https://covid19.who.int>. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/global-trends-2021-how-covid-transforming-international-development>.

² Christoph Lakner, Nishant Yonzan, Daniel Gerszon Mahler, R. Andres Castaneda Aguilar, and Haoyu Wu, "Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Looking back at 2020 and the outlook for 2021" (Washington, DC: World Bank, January 11, 2021), [https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-looking-back-2020-and-outlook-2021#:~:text=For%20the%20first%20time%20in,\(downside%20estimate\)%20in%202020](https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-looking-back-2020-and-outlook-2021#:~:text=For%20the%20first%20time%20in,(downside%20estimate)%20in%202020).

³ See World Bank, "Urgent, Effective Action Required to Quell the Impact of COVID-19 on Education Worldwide" (Washington, DC: World Bank, January 22, 2021), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2021/01/22/urgent-effective-action-required-to-quell-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-worldwide>; Mikaela Gavis and Samuel Pleeck, "Global Trends in 2021: How COVID-19 is Transforming International Development" (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, March 2, 2021), <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/Gavas-Pleleck-Global-Trends.pdf>.

concentrate power, diminish checks and balances, muzzle political opposition, and constrain the voices of civil society.⁴

- It has exposed weaknesses in public health, social welfare, and public information systems, often due to corruption and neglect. As a result of these systemic weaknesses, many governments have not been able to carry out effective responses to the public health crisis; instead, they have responded with harsh controls on populations, often enforced by security forces.⁵
- It has perpetuated historic discrimination against, and neglect of disadvantaged groups and individuals based on ethnicity, religion, sex, and disability. The discrimination has included blaming of disfavored groups for the pandemic or its consequences.⁶

At the same time, the pandemic has increased the visibility of opportunities to improve living conditions, achieve inclusive economic growth, strengthen open and effective governance, and expand freedom. Specifically, it has demonstrated:

- the value of capable and credible public institutions and effective public information strategies in establishing confidence and responding effectively to a public health crisis;⁷
- the resilience of civil society in carrying out its key roles in meeting community needs and pushing back against repressive government actions;⁸

⁴ See Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, March 2021), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021_World_02252021_FINAL-web-upload.pdf; V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2021: Autocratization Turns Viral* (Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, March 2021), . https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/c9/3f/c93f8e74-a3fd-4bac-adfd-ee2cfbc0a375/dr_2021.pdf.

⁵ See Daniela Cepeda Cuadrado, *The Ignored Pandemic Behind COVID-19: The impact of corruption on healthcare service delivery* (Berlin: Transparency International, December 2020), <http://ti-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The-Ignored-Pandemic-Behind-COVID-19-the-impact-of-corruption-on-healthcare.pdf>; Arush Lal, Ngozi A Erundu, David L Heymann, Githinji Gitahi, and Robert Yates, “Fragmented health systems in COVID-19: rectifying the misalignment between global health security and universal health coverage,” *The Lancet*, vol. 397, no. 10268, 66-67, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)32228-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)32228-5).

⁶ See Michelle Bachelet, “Addressing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on minority ethnic communities” (Geneva: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 24, 2020), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26541&LangID=E>; Sonia Sarkar, “Religious discrimination is hindering the covid-19 response” (London: BMJ, June 29, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m2280>; Ruth Hill and Ambar Narayan, “What COVID-19 can mean for long-term inequality in developing countries” (Washington, DC: World Bank, January 7, 2021), <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/what-covid-19-can-mean-long-term-inequality-developing-countries>.

⁷ See Lowy Institute, “COVID Performance Index: Deconstructing Pandemic Responses” (Sydney: Lowy Institute, January 2021), <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/features/covid-performance>.

⁸ See CIVICUS, *Solidarity in the Time of COVID-19: Civil Society Response to the Pandemic* (Johannesburg: CIVICUS, November 2020), https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2020/solidarity-in-the-time-of-covid-19_en.pdf.

- the need for strengthening social welfare systems, protecting the vulnerable against mistreatment and neglect, and fostering inclusion and equality;⁹ and
- the importance of digital technology – as a dangerous instrument of government repression and extremist recruitment, but also as a vital tool for increased economic productivity and inclusive human capital formation.¹⁰

What are the implications of these effects for international development cooperation?

In setting priorities and designing and carrying out policies, programs, and activities, participants in international cooperation should consider the following questions in the context of each distinct country situation:

- How best to promote economic growth that gives emphasis to restoring and preserving the well-being of those whose lives were severely affected by the pandemic, such as workers in the informal economy and in low-wage and migrant employment?
- How best to redress the structural exclusion, inequality, and discrimination that have so adversely affected women, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQ people, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups?
- How best to strengthen open government, democratic values, and respect for human rights, including an adequate voice for a vigorous civil society?
- How best to enable public health systems to work with competence and integrity to control potential health crises and carry out the complex work of adapting to new variations of the virus and implementing effective immunization programs in ways that enjoy broad public awareness, confidence, and participation?
- How best to make productive use of digital technology to improve government efficiency and economic productivity, inform the public, enrich education, and guard against risks of criminal activity and extremist violence?

What opportunities exist for the United States to address priority needs for inclusive economic growth, fair and equal treatment for victims of neglect and discrimination, strengthened democratic governance, increased health security, and productive use of digital technology?

⁹ See World Bank, *The State of Economic Inclusion Report 2021: The Potential to Scale* (Washington, DC: World Bank, January 2021), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34917>.

¹⁰ See John Roese, “COVID-19 exposed the digital divide. Here’s how we can close it,” World Economic Forum, January 27, 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/covid-digital-divide-learning-education>; USAID, *USAID Digital Strategy 2020-2024* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2020), https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/15396/USAID_Digital_Strategy.pdf.

- Experience over the past year has demonstrated that countries with adequate state capacity, epidemiologically sound public health strategies, and effective public outreach that inspires trust have been the most successful in responding to COVID-19. These qualities have proven to be more significant determinants than whether a country's political system was democratic or authoritarian.¹¹
- President Biden has declared that pandemic preparedness, health security, and global health are "top national security priorities." He has directed a series of specific actions to support the international public health and humanitarian response to COVID-19, including financing, the provision of assistance, and support for enhancing the capacity of the most vulnerable communities to prevent, detect, respond to, mitigate, and recover from impacts of COVID-19.¹²
- The Secretary of State, Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administrator of USAID, and Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will have lead roles in implementing the President's directive, working in a coordinated manner. The Secretary of State has appointed former USAID Administrator Gayle Smith as the Coordinator of the US Global COVID Response and Health Security. The President's FY 2022 budget request for international affairs includes \$10 billion for global health, including \$1 billion for global health security.¹³

In light of these developments, a focus on public health systems and related public communication strategies in developing countries could make an important contribution to enhancing local capacity and commitment to more effective national responses to the pandemic.¹⁴ In particular, such enhanced capacity and commitment would better enable developing countries to manage the complex challenges ahead, such as adapting to new variants of the virus, carrying out broadly inclusive vaccination campaigns, and increasing preparedness for future pandemics.

¹¹ The Lowy Institute Covid Performance Index (note 7, *supra*) examines impacts of geography, political systems, population size, and economic development on COVID-19 outcomes around the world.

¹² National Security Memorandum on United States Global Leadership to Strengthen the International COVID-19 Response and to Advance Global Health Security and Biological Preparedness, NSD 1, January 21, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/01/21/national-security-directive-united-states-global-leadership-to-strengthen-the-international-covid-19-response-and-to-advance-global-health-security-and-biological-preparedness>.

¹³ Secretary of State Antony Blinken Remarks to the Press, April 5, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-remarks-to-the-press-on-the-covid-response>. See Lara Jakes, "Gayle Smith, who helped lead the U.S. response to Ebola, will run Biden's vaccine diplomacy," *New York Times*, April 5, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/05/us/politics/gayle-smith-covid-vaccine.html>. Office of Management and Budget, "Summary of the President's Discretionary Funding Request," April 9, 2021, page 25, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FY2022-Discretionary-Request.pdf>.

¹⁴ See Muhammad Ali Pate, "Strong health care systems are key to deliver COVID-19 vaccines," *World Bank*, November 12, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/health/strong-health-care-systems-are-key-deliver-covid-19-vaccines>.

The specific elements of country strategies for such a US initiative would emerge in each case from collaborative dialogue and assessment with local stakeholders in order to be responsive to the country's political, economic, and social dynamics and US policies, capabilities, and interests.¹⁵ However, consideration should be given to opportunities for integrating fundamental issues such as governance (including corruption),¹⁶ the availability of financing,¹⁷ inclusion of disadvantaged populations,¹⁸ potential for productive use of digital technology to improve performance and increase public confidence,¹⁹ engagement with the private sector and civil society,²⁰ and preparedness for future pandemics.²¹

The newly created interagency global coordinator mechanism should facilitate coordination among participating agencies. For example, the presence of CDC country and regional offices around the world would seem to be a valuable asset for gaining the cooperation of local experts; USAID experience in building local public health systems would be highly relevant; and the State Department's diplomatic contacts and expertise, as well as its knowledge of public diplomacy, could promote coherent, overall US efforts suited to the particular content of each country strategy.²²

¹⁵ See Golam Rasul, "A Framework for Improving Policy Priorities in Managing COVID-19 Challenges in Developing Countries," *Frontiers in Public Health*, October 14, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.589681>.

¹⁶ See E. Gyimah Boadi, "Good Governance: Building trust between people and their leaders," chapter 6 in *Foresight Africa 2021* (Washington, DC: Brookings, January 2021), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/foresight-africa-2021>. See also Jon Vrushu and Roberto Martinez, "Why Fighting Corruption Matters in Times of COVID-19," (Berlin: Transparency International, January 28, 2021), <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2020-research-analysis-why-fighting-corruption-matters-in-times-of-covid-19>.

¹⁷ See Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Strengthening health systems during a pandemic: The role of development finance" (Paris: OECD, 2020), <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/strengthening-health-systems-during-a-pandemic-the-role-of-development-finance-f762bf1c>.

¹⁸ See Efrat Shadmi, Yingyao Chen, Inês Dourado, Inbal Faran-Perach, John Furler, Peter Hangoma, et al., "Health equity and COVID-19: global perspectives," *19 International Journal for Equity in Health* 104, (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-020-01218-z>.

¹⁹ See Jobid Budd, Benjamin S. Miller, Erin M. Manning, Vasileios Lamos, Mdngdie Zhuang, Michael Edelstein, Geraint Rees, et al., "Digital technologies in the public-health response to COVID-19," *26 Nature Medicine* 1183–1192 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-1011-4>

²⁰ See Ocheaga Ataguba and John Ataguba, "Social determinants of health: the role of effective communication in the COVID-19 pandemic in developing countries," *13 Global Health Action* (1), December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2020.1788263>.

²¹ Thomas J. Bollyky and Stewart M. Patrick, *Improving Preparedness: Lessons from COVID-19*, Independent Task Force Report No. 78, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, October 2020), <https://www.cfr.org/report/pandemic-preparedness-lessons-COVID-19>.

²² See "Where We Work," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhivtb/where-we-work/index.html>. See also Secretary of State Antony Blinken, remarks at the launch of GAVI's COVAX commitment, March 12, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/launch-of-gavis-covax-commitment>.