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| <b>FORUM:</b>           | Advisory Panel   |
| <b>ISSUE:</b>           | Measures to Promote a Resilient Recovery from the Adverse Social Consequences of the Pandemic in India |
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| <b>POSITION:</b>        | Deputy President of Advisory Panel   |

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## Introduction

The sudden outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease-19 (COVID-19) impacted the global community drastically. Since the declaration of the pandemic as the “Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)” on September 17, 2020, the crisis has not only brought changes in our lives, but also altered the social infrastructures in many member nations by posing threats to the public health, food systems, and the labor market. “The



*A COVID-19 Patient Receiving Medical Treatment in an Indian Hospital*

situation in India is beyond heartbreaking”. As the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced regarding the COVID crisis in India, it seems clear that the impact of the pandemic is severe. Currently, India has more than 48,000 new cases being reported every day, taking 13% of the new cases reported globally. Recognizing the devastating impact the pandemic has on India and its social systems, it seems crucial to resolve the current situation in India, not only for India itself but also for the global community, as COVID-19 and the variant virus observed in India is easily transmitted, having a potential to trigger a massive global infection enlarging the chance for an additional crisis.

## Background

India, which faced difficulties in preventing additional infections during the beginning of the crisis, has been responsible for the massive increase in COVID-19 infections today. Among the underlying factors of the crisis, the Indian government’s late response and the lack of sanitation systems within the country have played a role in the worsening of the situation. India, having limited access to



clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities, added by the high population density, has been an especially vulnerable region for mass infections. Not only sanitation but also the underdeveloped medical systems in India has served as an exacerbator of the national crisis. Currently, Indian hospitals are suffering from limitations in medical equipment, technology, and workforce. Due to these scarcities of medical supplies, thousands of people die even without a chance to receive proper medical care.

Along with these main causes of the adverse circumstances of the country, the consequences of the rapid transmission of the virus should also be considered. Due to the aforementioned factors that have been responsible for the pandemic, a new variant virus along with COVID-19 has been observed within India. While vaccines to prevent the infection of COVID-19 are developed, there is a high probability of another mass infection as the new virus incapacitates the effects of the currently released vaccines.

## Problems Raised

### *Increased Unemployment Rates*

The center responsible for monitoring the Indian economy has reported that while 403.5 million Indians were engaged in labor, and 35 million people unemployed before the pandemic, by January 2021, only 400 million people were in the workforce and an estimated 40-45 million people were unemployed, reflecting the job losses for millions of workers in India. The increasing unemployment rate is a threat to the Indian economy and the workers, as the wages become lower due to the massive supply of labor, followed by the degrading working conditions.



*The High Population Density in India*

### *Food Insecurity and Hunger*

According to the 2020 Global Hunger Index, India ranked the 94<sup>th</sup> among the 107 nations, which establishes that the food insecurity issues are serious in India. The pandemic further intensified food insecurity issues in India. After the outbreak of COVID-19, the food price in India surged due to the strong demand for food and lack of supply after the sudden announcement of a national lockdown. The raised food price, added by the increased rate of unemployment is posing a significant threat to the people in India, causing more families to reduce the amount and the quality of their consumption for food. The World Bank has addressed the importance of food price inflation on Less Economically Developed

Countries (LEDCs) by stating that “Rising food prices have a greater impact on people in low- and middle-income countries since they spend a larger share of their income on food than people in high-income countries”. India, being one of the countries with the high measures of the wealth gap and high rate of poverty, is especially vulnerable to food price inflation, causing a direct impact on the low social classes.

### Spikes in Food Inflation in India: January 2019 to December 2020



*Food Price Inflation in India During the Pandemic  
(Consumer Food Price Index)*

## International Actions

### *Funding by The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)*

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), a global organization responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid for nations in need, has been supporting India during the crisis by providing medical supplies including oxygen concentrators, diagnostic test kits, and emergency tools to help India overcome the difficulties faced by the pandemic and to save more lives. In addition to providing medical support, UNICEF has been working to solve the sanitation issues in India by providing more than 3.6 million people with critical water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) supplies and services. Few of these services include installing Elbow-operated taps and clean toilets in schools and densely populated regions which let the people wash their hands safely with clean water and solve sanitation issues. UNICEF also worked with the Indian government for raising awareness and sharing information on ways to prevent further infections.

### *Protection Programs Funded by The World Bank*

The World Bank, an international financial institution aimed to provide financial aid to low- and middle-income countries, provided a new \$500 million program to support India’s large informal workforce and allow for flexible actions against the crisis. This fund by the World Bank was not the first, as the World Bank has provided about \$1.65 billion for the efficient protection of the poor and vulnerable classes since the outbreak of COVID-19 in India. This fund has been used by the Indian government to form a more adaptive social protection system, and to provide additional support for marginalized groups through means such as ensuring social protection for workers directly involved in COVID-19 relief work,



and for groups under high risk of exclusion such as the migrants and the informal workers, as well as providing financial support for the locals.

## Key Players

### *World Health Organization (WHO)*

World Health Organization, as a part of the United Nations, is an agency responsible for international health. With its main objective as "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health", WHO is the organization that declares global pandemics and emergencies in health-related events. WHO has many regional offices which enables it to meet the special needs of specific regions, and the WHO Country Office for India (WCO India) has been working closely with the Indian government and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) to efficiently respond to COVID-19, through means such as surveillance, contact tracing, laboratory testing, risk communications, community engagement, hospital preparedness, and infection prevention and control.



*World Health Organization (WHO)*

### *United States of America*

The United States of America has been partnered with India since the U.S.- India Joint Statement in June 2016. Since then, United States has been cooperating with India in achieving shared developmental goals, which has continued today. This cooperation has allowed the USA to provide financial support to India for its response to the COVID pandemic. Currently, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided more than \$200 million for India's COVID-19 relief since the pandemic, and an additional \$41 million were contributed recently. The USAID not only assisted India financially but also helped train more than 214,000 medical workforces, benefitting more than 42 million locals.





## Possible Solutions

### *Encouragement of Vaccination*

One of the reasons why new outbreaks in India is increasing rapidly is since most India's citizens have gotten vaccinated, despite the provided supply of the vaccines; One the world's largest vaccine producing company exists within the country. This may be due to the limited vaccination information as well as the lack of national alertness of the issue. Since the authorized vaccines have been shown to reduce the possibilities of further COVID transmissions, its symptoms, and death, the increase in the vaccinated population would help the prevention of massive infections.

### *Strict Regulations on Social Distancing*

Noticing the high population density in India as well as the easy transmission of the virus (through the air or the exposure to infected respiratory fluids), governmental sanctions on social distancing would be influential in reducing further infections. Although India has begun its social distancing regulations, such actions are still not strictly followed by its people. As additional sanctions on social distancing norms have already been implemented in some developed countries (ex. South Korea, USA, etc.), the Indian government's actions on the regulation of cultural practices and meetings held in large numbers may have positive effects on the prevention of the spread of virus.

### *Aids in Medical Equipment and Experts*

The lack of advanced medical equipment necessary for combating the pandemic would be difficult to be resolved by India in the short term. As India is in extreme lack of oxygen tanks and sanitation supplies, a third-party intervention for aid may be influential. Supports from international organizations, such as the UN, with the supply of medical experts and medical equipment, may reduce the deaths of COVID patients in India, as many of them die due to the limited number of medical professionals and supplies for care in hospitals.



*Indian People Waiting for Oxygen Tanks for Medical Use*

## Glossary

### *Pandemic*

The situation in which a disease spreads across countries, adversely affecting many people.

### *Sanitation*

The conditions responsible for public health: especially relevant to clean water supply and sewage disposal.

### *Inflation*

The situation when something (especially price) rises in a high rate.

### *Variant Virus*

The virus which has undergone several changes from the original virus.

### *U.S.- India Joint Statement*

A treaty signed between the United States of America and India ensuring the cooperation between two countries to end extreme poverty and increase citizens' access to quality health care, education, water, sanitation, and energy.

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