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World Hunger Day Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Priorities in Preventing Food Protests



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May 28, 2020 marks World Hunger Day, when the world contemplates on how the 820 million food insecure people can be lifted out of their plight. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic disruption it is causing, the focus for this year is on hunger as an issue requiring a global response, amidst rapidly changing environment.

At first glance, one may think that a pause from the previous year's theme of food sustainability agenda is needed, to be able to focus on the more urgent issue of disruption. In 2019, the agenda prioritised long-term structural issues causing hunger: lack of decent work opportunities (especially for women), inequitable access to education, food production practices that cause soil

erosion, and climate change that threatens to reduce the productivity of agriculture.

However, long-term structural issues and short-term disruptions are two sides of the same coin. For instance, during the 2007 food crisis, demonstrations erupted in over 60 countries because international prices of staple items like rice and corn were inflated to two to three times their normal levels, making them inaccessible to poorer communities. Today, riots are also occurring across multiple countries, such as France, Lebanon and Italy. Protesters are claiming that their lost income during the quarantine or lockdown period prevents them from affording the minimum requirements for living with dignity. Food prices are increasing too due to supply chain disruptions when

workers in food distribution are quarantined and forced to stop work.

Essentially, disruptions exacerbate pre-existing structural issues faced by communities in obtaining essential commodities, foremost of which is food. It is the same structurally vulnerable groups who suffer most during disruptions: they are women who have fewer job opportunities and individuals who are less educated, among others.

Food protests may also occur in Southeast Asia too, if lockdown measures are extended and yet individuals are not provided sufficient support by their governments.

Moving forward, governments should allocate resources to provide relief or support especially to vulnerable groups highlighted in the longer-term food sustainability agenda, including women, the less educated, and the unemployed. Some states such as Aus-

tralia, Malaysia, Singapore and the United States have already allocated funding worth more than 10 percent of their GDP to provide these packages.

In the same way that the crisis exacerbates pre-existing issues concerning equity, it also stands to worsen the plight of countries that were already deep in debt or facing currency/debt crises prior to the pandemic. For instance, given the currency crisis in Lebanon, one woman was holding a placard saying her income could only afford her two cartons of milk!

In this regard, poorer countries will need special support from the international community as well. For instance, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recently approved debt relief to 25 countries in view of the pandemic. Other members of the international community may do well to follow the

the example of the IMF too, redoubling efforts such as providing assistance or delivering food aid.

In today's globalised and interconnected world, the international community is only as strong as its weakest link. The failure to support poorer individuals and poorer countries is not an option, if the global community is to ride the wave of the current crisis, and to reduce damage from future crises too.

Suggested Readings

- The Hunger Project, 2020, "World Hunger Day" [website], Accessed 14 May 2020.
- Adrian Wail Akhlas, 2020, "Indonesia's COVID-19 stimulus worth 2.5% of GDP, lower than Singapore, Malaysia", *The Jakarta Post*, 7 April 2020.
- Bassem Mroue, 2020, "Riots in impoverished north Lebanon city amid currency crash", *Associate Press*, 27 April 2020.
- International Monetary Fund, 2020, "IMF executive board approves immediate debt relief for 25 countries", *IMF Press Release No. 20/151*, 13 April 2020.
- Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros and Mely Caballero-Anthony, 2020, "Global health security - the burden of COVID-19: Urgent need for social safety nets," *RSIS Commentary CO20043*, 19 March 2020.

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

What the coronavirus pandemic teaches us about fighting climate change

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to develop a better path forward. The global fallout from COVID-19 demonstrates the need to invest in resilience measures before a catastrophe strikes.

Alice C. Hill
Council on Foreign Relations

10 April 2020

COVID-19 crisis: Timely reminder for climate change

Amidst the virus turmoil, our natural surroundings have benefited from the slowdown. The global community needs to make a concerted effort to rethink our approach to economic growth to avert a climate crisis.

Margareth Sembiring
RSIS Commentary

17 April 2020

Xinhua headlines: Pursuing green development, China endeavors to protect Earth

Pursuing low-carbon and innovation-driven development, China has been contributing a lot to protect the planet with its comprehensive efforts that promote circular economy and sustainable development.

Cheng Lu
Xinhua

21 April 2020

We can restore marine health by 2050, finds study

The key to success is lessening the impact and stresses on the ocean, while restoring damaged ecosystems, and trying to reduce carbon emissions that drive climate change.

Elizabeth Claire Alberts
China Dialogue Ocean

27 April 2020

Will the coronavirus crisis trump the climate crisis?

The question is how far anyone is willing to go now, as political leaders across the continent come under pressure from citizens for economic relief, as well as from industries desperate to get their old factories running again.

Steven Erlanger
The New York Times

9 May 2020

Joint efforts needed to protect water resources: Việt Nam River Network

Vietnam needs to consolidate its legal framework and have institutions strong enough to better manage water resources and improve legal enforcement capacity of authorities from the central level to grassroots level.

Việt Nam News

11 May 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Water security beyond COVID-19

Strengthening water security is essential for preventing and combatting future pandemics. Interventions to strengthen water security should focus on four key areas: adequate water availability, acceptable water security, water resources management, and affordable access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

Rachel Cooper,
GSDRC, University of Birmingham

2020

The net-zero challenge: Fast-forward to decisive climate action

Progress on climate action to date has been limited. Since progress in international negotiations is disappointing, corporations and governments need to move unilaterally. Ecosystem actions can overcome barriers, through collaborations along value chains or with industry peers.

World Economic Forum

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

7th APFSD "Accelerating action for and delivery of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific"

The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) is an annual and inclusive intergovernmental forum and a regional platform for supporting countries, in particular those with special needs, in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Webinar

20 May 2020

International Day for Biological Diversity

The United Nations has proclaimed May 22 the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues.

Worldwide

22 May 2020

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

How to keep nuclear power plants operating safely during the coronavirus pandemic

Nuclear installations across the world are taking sensible steps to maintain safety and security while providing power to vital operations during the COVID-19 crisis. But they will also need to share information, learn quickly, and adapt over the course of the crisis.

William Tobey, Simon Saradzhyan and Nickolas Roth

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

16 April 2020

Southeast Asia's hydropower boom grinds to a halt as COVID-19 stalls projects

Hydropower dam projects in Southeast Asia, particularly along the Mekong River, might be delayed or cancelled as the COVID-19 pandemic impacts major industries, energy markets and worker safety.

Jack Board

CNA

22 April 2020

Clean energy progress after the COVID-19 crisis will need reliable supplies of critical minerals

As the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed many countries into some forms of lockdown and hit mining operations across the globe, the risks around clean energy supply chains, including those of minerals, must be strategically addressed.

Tae-Yoon Kim and Milosz Karpinski

International Energy Agency

6 May 2020

How will COVID-19 reshape Asia's energy future?

With the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic still playing out in the Asia-Pacific, it may take a while to fully determine the impact on the energy sector at the regional and national levels. Nonetheless, the fallout could delay some of the momentum toward a cleaner energy future.

Prashanth Parameswaran

The Diplomat

6 May 2020

COVID-19 won't stop environmental catastrophe

Clearer skies and slashed fossil fuel use are benefits that will likely vanish as soon as the crisis is over. In the rush to get back on track, only fossil fuels - plentiful and cheap - will be capable of meeting the sudden massive demand for energy.

Jonathan Gornall

Asia Times

9 May 2020

Oil prices drop amid supply glut, fears of second coronavirus wave

Oil prices fell due to concern over the threat of global economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in spite of agreed supply cuts by some of the world's top oil producers.

Florence Tan

Yahoo Finance

11 May 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Domestic coal: A hindrance to renewable energy development?

This article aims to probe the cheap domestic coal argument. There is a need to go beyond the low-cost domestic coal axiom and examine deeper underlying factors that support or hinder renewable energy development in coal-producing countries.

Margareth Sembiring

NTS Insight, Singapore: RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies

2020

Global energy review 2020

The uncertainty surrounding public health, the economy and hence energy over the rest of 2020 is unprecedented. This report not only charts a possible path for energy use and CO2 emissions in 2020 but also highlights the many factors that could lead to differing outcomes.

International Energy Agency

Paris: IEA

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Call for Papers: Special Issue on "COVID-19 Impacts on Energy and Environment"

The special issue aims to capture the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on global energy markets, energy resilience, the environment and climate change. It will also be a repository of the contributions of energy science, technology and policy in the mitigation of the pandemic crisis.

Applied Energy

1 October 2020 (deadline)

Call for Papers: Special Issue on "Renewable Energy Technologies in the Era of Circular Economy"

This special issue will include analyses across the range of renewables, focusing on technological management-based practices, which could be part of the circular economy.

Renewable Energy

30 September 2020 (deadline)

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

COVID-19: Its impact on food sufficiency

While COVID-19 has focused attention on the immediate danger of food shortages, it behooves small island states like Singapore to continue efforts to develop more stable and sustainable food sources.

Paul Teng
RSIS Commentary
26 March 2020

From a health pandemic to food crisis

While engaging in hoarding behaviour at the national level may seem like a strategic move in response to household hoarding amidst disruptions in trade, doing so can potentially trigger a repeat of the 2007-08 food crisis.

Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros
Khmer Times
9 April 2020

ASEAN pledges to ensure food security during COVID-19 outbreak

ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) issued a Joint Statement to minimise disruptions in regional food supply chains.

ASEAN Secretariat News
17 April 2020

Food Security and COVID-19

As the coronavirus crisis unfolds, disruptions in domestic food supply chains and other shocks affecting food production, as well as loss of incomes and remittances are creating strong tensions and food security risks in many countries.

The World Bank
4 May 2020

How nutrition can protect people's health during COVID-19

With so many people falling ill from COVID-19, unhealthy diets are contributing to pre-existing conditions that put them more at risk.

Muhammad Ali Pate and Martien Van Nieuwkoop
World Bank Blogs
13 May 2020

COVID-19 is disrupting a food industry already thrown into turmoil by climate change

Today's COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the critical role of rice in ensuring global food security while combating climate change.

United Nations Environment Programme
14 May 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

2020 global nutrition report

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for more equitable, resilient and sustainable food and health systems has never been more urgent.

Independent Expert Group
2020

Maintaining food resilience in a time of uncertainty

COVID-19 will place further stress on ASEAN's food system as the region faces long-term food security challenges.

PRC and Food Industry Asia
PricewaterhouseCoopers Ltd
2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

COVID-19: Food Security in the Pandemic

This webinar will deconstruct and explain the agricultural value chain, examine the mechanisms in place to assess its processes and dependencies, and identify how populations with special needs can be supported through this period.

Webinar
27 May 2020

COVID-19: How the Dairy Sector Can Support Resilient Food Systems in East Africa

Dairy presents a unique opportunity to address some of the most detrimental effects of COVID-19, while putting East African food systems on a path toward more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive growth.

Webinar
28 May 2020

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Global Health Security - COVID-19: Private sector's role in times of crisis

The severity and scale of the COVID-19 outbreak highlight the need for multiple stakeholder engagement. The private sector can play a vital role in supporting the state to manage this outbreak.

Christopher Chen
RSIS Commentary
26 March 2020

Global Health Security - COVID-19 and global health diplomacy: Can Asia rise to the challenge?

Averting the catastrophic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic requires no less than a coordinated and effective global response with participation of all actors at multiple levels of governance. Asia must seize the opportunity to define its role in this endeavour.

Mely Caballero-Anthony
RSIS Commentary
2 April 2020

Global Health Security - Military responses to COVID-19: Advantages and constraints

Governments around the world are deploying their military forces to respond to COVID-19. While there are advantages in involving militaries in the fight against the coronavirus, there are also constraints and potential drawbacks for doing so.

Angelo Paolo Trias
RSIS Commentary
7 April 2020

Global Health Security - COVID-19 and school closures: Why education sector needs protecting

Around 90 percent of the world's students are currently out of school as a result of the global pandemic. This situation cannot be without serious repercussions and will not be an easy scenario to walk back from.

Tamara Nair
RSIS Commentary
9 April 2020

When health crises collide - tackling malaria, COVID-19 and Ebola in Burundi

Simultaneously responding to some of the biggest health crises the world has ever faced is no small task and requires significant time, coordination and resources.

UN Development Programme
Medium
24 April 2020

The next COVID crisis could be a wave of suicides

The isolation, grief and economic hardship related to COVID-19 are creating a mental health crisis in the US as researchers warn it could make the already-rising suicide rate worse.

Cynthia Koons, Riley Griffin and Emma Court
Bloomberg
8 May 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Geographical tracking and mapping of coronavirus disease COVID-19/severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) epidemic and associated events around the world: How 21st century GIS technologies are supporting the global fight against outbreaks and epidemics

This paper describes a range of practical online/mobile GIS and mapping dashboards and applications for tracking the 2019/2020 coronavirus epidemic. It assesses additional ways GIS can support the fight against infectious disease outbreaks and epidemics.

Maged N. Kamel Boulos and Estella M. Geraghty, International Journal of Health Geographics, Vol. 19, No. 8
2020

Evidence of behaviour change during an Ebola virus disease outbreak, Sierra Leone

This study examines trends in knowledge about the Ebola virus disease, acceptance of safe burial practices, attitudes towards Ebola survivors, and the uptake of prevention practices during the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone between 2014 and 2015.

Mohamed F. Jalloh et al., Bulletin of the World Health Organisation, Vol. 98, No. 5
2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

International Conference on Emergency Management and Healthcare 2020

This conference will bring together academic scientists, researchers and research scholars to share their experiences and research results on all aspects of Emergency Medicine and Healthcare.

Lisbon, Portugal
16-17 September 2020

2020 - 22nd International Conference on Research in Life-Sciences and Healthcare (ICRLSH)

This conference will present research studies on Life Sciences and Healthcare, spearheaded by the Healthcare and Biological Sciences Research Association.

Singapore
5-6 November 2020

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

"We are all fragile, but we are not all equally fragile": Humanitarian operations amidst COVID-19 pandemic

This article highlights some of the potential impacts COVID-19 can have or is already having on humanitarian operations around the world.

Andrea Silkoset

PRIO

8 April 2020

COVID-19 funding for NGOs: If not now, when?

This article accentuates the urgent need for funding to be directed to local NGOs in affected countries, which offer agility, reach, depth of experience, and frontline access.

Christina Bennett

The New Humanitarian

21 April 2020

Why nations must prepare for natural disasters amid the current Covid-19 pandemic

In the face of the dual challenges of a global pandemic and climate-related disasters, this article shows the need to build the general resilience of populations and prepare for intersecting risks.

Giriraj Amarnath

**International Water Management
Institute**

22 April 2020

Refugee groups fill gaps in COVID-19 response, and they need support

Refugee-led organisations have long played important but neglected roles in providing protection and assistance to other refugees and host communities. Now they find themselves on the front line of the COVID-19 response in camps and cities around the world as other organisations withdraw.

**Robert Hakiza, Alexander Betts, Evan Easton-Calabria and
Kate Pincock**

The New Humanitarian

29 April 2020

The dual risks of natural disasters and COVID-19

This article presents research which combines simple epidemiological models with natural hazard curves to investigate potential scenarios that could eventuate in several countries, if there were to be a natural disaster.

**Januka Attanayake, Mark Quigley, Andrew King and Fabian
Prideaux**

PHYSORG

6 May 2020

The future for humanitarian workers after COVID-19

This article examines how COVID-19 will affect the way organisations carry out humanitarian work in the future.

Ali Al Mokdad

Devex

8 May 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Reducing the risk of protracted and multiple disaster displacements in Asia-Pacific

This report looks at displacements caused by natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific. The authors provide recommendations on reducing the risk of such displacements and upholding basic human rights for actors in the field.

Katie Peters and Emma Lovell

Geneva: UNDRR and ODI

2020

Preparedness for disability inclusive disaster risk reduction

This issue looks at the inclusion of persons with disabilities in disaster policy in Pakistan. It looks at the current initiatives and provide suggestions as to future directions.

**Sajid Naeem and Muhammad Hamayun
Islamabad: Pakistan Resilience Partnership**

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Preparing for the Hurricane Season in Light of the Impact of COVID-19 on our Caribbean Economy

The objective of this webinar is to explore a multi-hazard approach to risk management and the way in which COVID-19 has affected regional preparation for hurricane season.

Webinar

19 May 2020

16th International Conference on Structures under Shock and Impact

This conference will promote the need to enhance protection of civilian infrastructure and industrial facilities from natural disasters, technological accidents, and attacks.

Lisbon, Portugal

22-24 June 2020

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

COVID-19 measures leave Southeast Asia's migrant workers exposed, lay bare their living conditions

Migrants workers are among the most vulnerable communities to the COVID-19 due to their crowded quarters and reduced access to healthcare. Migrants rights groups have called for a more equitable approach to successfully deal with the pandemic.

Neo Chai Chin Eco-Business

7 April 2020

How the coronavirus crisis will affect Hong Kong's migration dynamics

COVID-19 could have longer-term impacts on migration in Hong Kong. These impacts include a decrease in labour migration and citizen emigration, the politicisation of cross-border mobility travel, and an increase in migrant integration

Greta Lai
South China Morning Post

12 April 2020

Global Health Security - Impact of COVID-19: Can irregular migrants cope?

Already facing stigmatisation and a lack of resources, irregular migrants will be one of the hardest hit communities by COVID-19. However, they are still often overlooked in policy discussions.

S.Nanthini
RSIS Commentary

16 April 2020

COVID-19 could bring about a migration crisis. Here's how we can avoid it

An inclusive international framework is vital to defeat COVID-19. Legal measures such as lockdowns and border closures may lead to anti-migration sentiments, despite migrants' disproportionate vulnerability to COVID-19.

Md. Shahidul Haque
World Economic Forum

17 April 2020

Rohingya refugees rejected everywhere as countries grapple with COVID-19 concerns

With countries tightening border controls due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Rohingya refugees fleeing by boat are being rejected by countries in the region including Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand.

Dian Septiari
The Jakarta Post

26 April 2020

COVID-19 outbreak has hastened shift to cash-less world for Singapore's migrant workers

As Singapore's migrant workers are being confined to their lodgings, they have increased their use of digital banking to receive their salaries and send remittances home.

Lester Wong
The Straits Times

13 May 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Situation analysis of migrant health in Viet Nam

This report looks at the relationship between health and migration in Vietnam. It outlines the current situation and steps to be taken to promote migrant health via the development of a national action plan.

Khue Ngoc Luong, et al
Hanoi: International Organization for Migration-Green One UN House

2020

Migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic: An initial analysis

This paper examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants. It looks at measures adopted in their host and home countries to address the negative impacts and promote COVID-19 policies which are migrant-inclusive.

Lorenzo Guadagno
Geneva: International Organization for Migration
2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sending State Regimes and International Skilled Migration: Asian Perspectives in the Age of Global Migration

This workshop will bring together papers which explore an Asian perspective on themes such as sending state regimes and international labour migration.

Singapore
26 -27 August 2020

International Conference on Refugee and Forced Migration Studies

The World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology is inviting academics and practitioners to share their work in all aspects of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies.

Sydney, Australia
27-28 August 2020