

CLIMATE CHANGE
page 3

ENERGY SECURITY
page 4

FOOD SECURITY
page 5

HEALTH SECURITY
page 6

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF
page 7

MIGRATION
page 8

Humanitarian Assistance in a Post-Pandemic World



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World Humanitarian Day takes place on 19th August each year to recognise aid workers who risk their lives every day to help others in the most extreme circumstances around the world. It commemorates the 2003 bombing of the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq, which killed 22 people. It also provides an opportunity to pay tribute to those who have fallen while helping people in need.

This year, World Humanitarian Day comes as the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic. Humanitarian workers are overcoming unprecedented access hurdles to assist people in humanitarian crises around the world. As such, this year's campaign - #ReallifeHeroes - pays special tribute to the humanitarian practitioners on the ground who are risking their lives to continue to save and protect lives despite conflict, insecurity, lack of access, and

risks linked to COVID-19.

Faced with the most significant global pandemic in a century, the humanitarian system will be forced to reconfigure itself to reach those most in need. Two broad trends appear to be developing.

The first broad trend relates to the localisation of humanitarian aid. At a time when affected communities require more humanitarian support, COVID-19 lockdown measures have restricted humanitarian access to people most in need. It has forced countries to focus on containing the pandemic with national lockdown measures — at the cost of hindering humanitarian action and denying aid to many affected communities. With overseas travel restrictions severely hampering the movement of international humanitarian workers, the need to empower and strengthen local humanitarian actors becomes even more pressing. In a sense, it will accelerate the pace of the localisation agenda in

many countries. The current pandemic is forcing the aid sector to adapt to a 'new normal' in terms of providing humanitarian assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. When external humanitarian agencies are unable to respond, the onus falls on national and local actors – who are already on the ground – to provide assistance to vulnerable and affected populations.

Apart from recognising locally-based aid workers, the #RealLifeHeroes campaign should also include a commitment towards empowering them. International aid agencies need to build equitable, sustainable partnerships with local actors, and identify areas where they can add value. The key is to build complementary structures, so that national and local actors can build up their own capabilities and take on greater responsibilities.

The second trend pertains to funding. The COVID-19 pandemic is currently creating

huge challenges for countries and communities around the world. Governments have imposed movement restrictions and national lockdowns in a bid to control the spread of the virus. These restrictions have resulted in predictions of the worst global recession since the Great Depression. In times of economic crisis, international development assistance programs have always been easy targets for significant belt tightening. Even before the pandemic, the lack of funding has already been an issue within the humanitarian sector. According to UN OCHA's Financial Tracking Service, in 2019, only 63 percent of required funding was made available to humanitarian organisations. The economic effects of the pandemic will surely lead to a decrease in aid in the near term. As of the first quarter of 2020, donor countries had only donated 13 percent of what these organisations needed for the year.

The pandemic is likely to challenge the financial balance and models of many aid organisations in the next few years. Humanitarian organisations and development agencies will be forced to scrutinise fundamental aspects of their programmes and streamline their processes to adapt to the decreased funding. However, in the midst of this pandemic, we cannot afford to allow a lapse in funding to those who are responding simultaneously to disasters and humanitarian and health crises. To this end, the humanitarian funding system needs to be more needs-based, as opposed to one that is supply-driven.

As we celebrate World Humanitarian Day, there is a need to acknowledge that the pandemic is leaving its own indelible mark on the world and the humanitarian sector. Crises pose challenges but are also moments of change. COVID-19 might just be the impetus needed to spur reform in the aid sector.

Suggested Readings

- "World Humanitarian Day 2020," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, accessed 13 August 2020, <https://www.unocha.org/world-humanitarian-day-2020>.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19 United Nations Coordinated Appeal April – December 2020 GHRP May Update," July 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHRP-COVID19_July_update_0.pdf
- Jessica Alexander, "COVID-19 Changed the World. Can it Change Aid, Too?" *The New Humanitarian*, 16 July 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/special-report/2020/07/16/Rethinking-humanitarianism-will-coronavirus-change-aid>.
- Reis Chen, "5 Ways the Coronavirus is Making the World's Most Vulnerable a Lot More Vulnerable." *The Washington Post*, 18 May 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/05/18/5-ways-coronavirus-is-making-worlds-most-vulnerable-lot-more-vulnerable/>.
- Robert Hakiza, Alexander Betts, Evan Easton-Calabria, and Kate Pincock, "Refugee Groups Fill Gaps in COVID-19 Response, and They Need Support," *The New Humanitarian*, 29 April 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2020/04/29/coronavirus-response-refugee-camps-humanitarian-aid>.

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Climate change and environment: Beyond decarbonising and greening

COVID-19 global lockdowns potentially bring down this year's carbon emissions up to 7 percent, close to the ideal yearly 7.6 percent drop within the next decade to reach the 1.5°C Paris target. It shows the scale of needed changes to economic activities to save the planet as the current decarbonising and greening approaches are struggling to achieve.

Margareth Sembiring

NTS-Asia Consortium Newsletter

29 July 2020

Climate change: UK peat emissions could cancel forest benefits

Many degraded peatlands in the UK are actually increasing carbon emissions. Yet, there has been much more focus from the government and media on forests than on peat bogs.

Roger Harrabin

BBC

7 August 2020

Plastic pollution plagues Southeast Asia amid Covid-19 lockdowns

Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia have seen a surge in plastic waste as environmental awareness takes a back seat to health concerns.

Tashny Sukumaran

South China Morning Post

9 August 2020

Opinion: Embracing intelligent water solutions is critical for post pandemic world

The post -COVID-19 world is going to witness an increased emphasis on digital solutions and transformation across industries. Intelligent water solutions can be used to bridge the growing gap between water supply and demand.

Saravanan Paneer Selvam

The Week

13 August 2020

China issues new sustainability rules for its notorious fishing fleet

China has made the first major revisions to regulations governing its distant-water fishing fleet in 17 years. The new rules aim to curb illegal activity, increase transparency, and improve sustainability in commercial fishing.

Elizabeth Fitt

Mongabay

14 August 2020

BHP to steer mining lobby groups' climate change policies

BHP, the world's largest listed miner, has faced increasing pressure from investors worried that some mineral lobby groups are promoting coal use in contravention of the goals of the Paris climate pact. BHP vows to ensure its supported lobby groups adopt its climate change position.

Reuters, Channel News Asia

14 August 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Current and future global climate impacts resulting from COVID-19

The direct effect of the pandemic-driven response will be negligible. Green economic recovery and reductions in fossil fuel investments may avoid future warming of 0.3 °C by 2050.

Piers M. Forster, et al.

Nature Climate Change

2020

Five lessons from COVID-19 for advancing climate change mitigation

First, delay is costly. Second, policy design must overcome biases to human judgment. Third, inequality can be exacerbated without timely action. Fourth, global problems require multiple forms of international cooperation. Fifth, transparency of normative positions is needed to navigate value judgments at the science-policy interface.

David Klenert, Franziska Funke, Linus Mattauch and Brian O'Callaghan

Environmental and Resource Economics

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Climate Week NYC

Climate Week NYC facilitates community engagement and action at all levels. Event organisers include policy makers, international businesses, academic institutions, museums, community groups and non-profits, convening everything from panel discussions to concerts, exhibitions and seminars.

New York City, the United States (Virtual)

21-27 September 2020

6th International Climate Change Adaptation Conference

This biennial conference seeks to enhance the knowledge base by bringing together research scientists, policy makers and practitioners from developed and developing countries to share knowledge and to have fruitful discussion on adaptation challenges and opportunities.

New Delhi, India

29 September - 1 October 2020

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Duterte orders Energy dept., agencies to recommend steps on possible use of Bataan power plant

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte issued an executive order creating the Nuclear Energy Program Inter-Agency Committee (NEPIAC), tasked mainly to study the adoption of a national position on nuclear power.

CNN Philippines

29 July 2020

Is natural gas still the fuel of the future?

There are threats to gas demand growth in all the key markets. These threats will gradually increase the pressure on gas demand over the years and even decades.

Irina Slave

Oilprice.com

5 August 2020

US examines whether Saudi nuclear programme could lead to nuclear weapons

US intelligence agencies are examining Saudi Arabia's efforts to build up its ability to produce nuclear fuel that could put the kingdom on a path to developing nuclear weapons.

NYTimes

The Straits Times

6 August 2020

Japan's climate change efforts hindered by bi-ased business lobby: Study

The influence of the country's electricity, steel, cement, car and fossil fuel sectors undermines Japan's attempts to meet its Paris Agreement commitments as they push for national policies that favour coal.

Reuters

The Straits Times

6 August 2020

Trump Administration pivots to nuclear energy, finds lever against China, Russia

Expanding US commercial nuclear power abroad could become the Trump administration's strongest lever against Chinese and Russian expansion plans in the global market.

Dipka Bhambhani

Forbes

7 August 2020

Oil giants' production cuts come to 1 million bpd as they post massive writedowns

The world's five largest oil companies collectively cut the value of their assets by nearly US\$50 billion in the second quarter, and reduced production rates as the COVID-19 pandemic caused a drastic fall in oil prices and demand.

Reuters

Yahoo News

9 August 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The future of nuclear security in the Asia-Pacific: Expanding the role of Southeast Asia

The article recommends three practical mechanisms to expand cooperation frameworks in Southeast Asia to the broader Asia-Pacific region: (1) strengthening regional capacity building in nuclear security; (2) establishing an ASEAN-Northeast Asia network of nuclear security centers of excellence (COEs) and knowledge centers; and (3) enhancing regional nuclear emergency preparedness and response.

Julius Cesar Trajano and Mely Caballero-Anthony

International Journal of Nuclear Security, Vol. 6, No.2

2020

The INSEN experience, by INSEN chairs

This paper provides the perspectives of current and past chairs of the International Nuclear Security Education Network (INSEN) on the impact of INSEN's activities on global and national nuclear security education and capacity building.

Tariq Majeed, et al.

International Journal of Nuclear Security, Vol. 6, No. 2

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Online Event: Innovation in Advanced Nuclear Energy

This webinar focused on innovation being adopted in nuclear energy and how various efforts in this field fit into the innovation chain, from basic science to commercialisation and deployment

Recorded Webinar

14 July 2020

Singapore-IEA Regional Training Programme on Sustainable Energy Policies in Smart Cities

The training programme aims to equip regional participants with greater knowledge and skills to establish a pathway towards energy efficient, smart and sustainable city planning in their respective countries.

Singapore

7- 10 September 2020

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

'Country-driven' approach needed to limit COVID-19 damage to food security

The UN FAO's director-general encouraged countries to be more proactive in helping avoid a global food emergency during and after the pandemic, while simultaneously working on medium to long-term development responses for food security and nutrition.

UN News
Caricom Today
20 July 2020

The 'egg-onomics' of food security

Key dilemmas faced in promoting a more secure and diversified supply chain in eggs, are those between agility and food safety; between prices and diversification; and between resilience and unfamiliarity of new food sources.

Jose M.L. Montesclaros, Paul S. Teng and Mely Caballero-Anthony
The Straits Times
24 July 2020

Trans-Pacific trade bloc says to ensure food, medicine supplies amid pandemic

In a joint statement, ministers from a trans-Pacific trade bloc have agreed to fight protectionism and avoid food and medicine shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Laura Gottesdiener and Frank Jack Daniel
Reuters
6 August 2020

China's food security concerns mount, but supply risks are growing as farmers hoard grains

Industry insiders say the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in farmers holding about 20 to 30 per cent more grain in reserve in their home warehouses.

Orange Wang
South China Morning Post
7 August 2020

Food security: Satellites provide crucial data on crops during COVID-19

NASA, European Space Agency and the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency have developed a tool providing information on planting and harvesting for key food and agriculture commodities.

European Space Agency
SciTech Daily
10 August 2020

China launches 'Clean Plate' campaign against food waste

Given mass flooding affecting farms across southern China in recent weeks, President Xi Jinping encouraged to maintain a sense of crisis about food security. This includes avoiding food waste among consumers.

Kerry Allen
BBC News
13 August 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

International Food Security Assessment, 2020–30

The assessment reports that the shock to global GDP from COVID-19 is projected to increase the number of food-insecure people by almost 84 million and increase the prevalence of food insecurity by an additional 2.2 percentage points.

Felix Aquedano, et al.
Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture
2020

Monitoring the impact of COVID-19 in Myanmar: Agricultural production and rural livelihoods in two irrigation schemes - June 2020 survey round

This report finds that about 56 percent of surveyed households in Myanmar experienced income loss as a result of COVID-19, through livelihood sources such as farming, non-farm enterprises, wage employment, and remittances.

Isabel Lambrecht, et al.
Strategy Support Program Policy Note 20, International Food Policy Research Institute
2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

World Bank's COVID-19: The Impact of the Crisis on Global Food Security

The World Bank's Vice President for Sustainable Development discussed actions that can be taken to help the poorest and most vulnerable access the food they need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recorded Webinar
21 April 2020

United Nations Launch of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020 (SOFI)

This launch of the SOFI report presented the most recent and authoritative estimates of the extent of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition around the world.

Recorded Webinar
13 July 2020

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

COVID-19 and its impacts – pandemic fatigue: Re-examining re-opening's logic

Many economies have already started to re-open in spite of growing COVID-19 active cases, but it may be for the wrong reasons, and some may be premature. Analysing the healthcare and fiscal capacity of countries provides insights on framing the logic of re-opening.

Jose Ma. Luis P. Montesclaros and Mely Cabellero-Anthony

RSIS Commentaries

22 July 2020

COVID-19 and its impacts – race for the vaccine: Will ASEAN be left behind?

While COVID-19 has made physical distancing the norm and diminished the visibility of ASEAN summitry, it also presents an opportunity for the region to make a lasting impact on its people. Will ASEAN be left behind in the global race for the vaccine?

Joel Ng

RSIS Commentaries

23 July 2020

U.S., Taiwan sign first-ever MOU on health cooperation

Taiwan and the United States signed their first memorandum of understanding (MOU) on health cooperation to expand cooperation on global health security, infectious disease control and vaccine development.

Chang Ming-Hsuen, Chen Wei-ting and Emerson Lim

Focus Taiwan

10 August 2020

Germany says Russian Covid-19 vaccine has not been sufficiently tested

President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia has become the first country to grant regulatory approval to a COVID-19 vaccine after less than two months of human testing. However, Moscow's decision to grant approval before final trials have been completed has raised concerns among some experts.

Reuters

The Straits Times

12 August 2020

Indian villagers tire of COVID-19 rules just as rural cases surge

In several rural villages in India, people have largely given up on social distancing and masks after months of sticking to the rules, believing the virus is not a serious threat. The change in behaviour has come as infections in the countryside have surged.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

12 August 2020

On the ground in Vietnam's new COVID epicenter of Danang

A surge in infections in Danang believed to have originated in the city and spreading elsewhere in the country has brought a series of emergency measures, with neighborhoods barricaded and residents are being mandatorily tested.

Hugh Bohane

Nikkei Asian Review

13 August 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

COVID-19 and the impacts on women

COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on people, especially as a result of their genders, disabilities, ethnicities, socio-economic class, race and even age. When it comes to differentiated impacts, women bear a disproportionate load of the adverse impacts of the pandemic. Our commitments to gender equality and women's rights should be upheld, more than ever, during this global pandemic.

S. Nanthini and Tamara Nair,

NTS Insight, No. IN20-05, Singapore: Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies

2020

Travel restrictions and SARS-CoV-2 transmission: An effective distance approach to estimate impact

This study evaluates the effect of travel restrictions on the risk of COVID-19 transmission, using a hazard-based model and the concept of effective distance. It highlights the importance of strengthening local capacities for disease monitoring and control.

Shoi Shi, et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organisation, Vol. 98, No. 8

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

ST Webinar: Covid-19, Six Months On

This webinar discussed the pandemic, six months on, and what we can expect in the days ahead.

Recorded Webinar

23 July 2020

Learning from COVID-19 to Build a Resilient Future

This webinar shed light on how various parties, such as editors, scientists, physicians, governments and international bodies, should work together to ensure a more secure future for all.

Recorded Webinar

24 July 2020

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

COVID-19 changed the world. Can it change aid, too?

COVID-19 has forced humanitarian actors around the world to relook at the way they work. This crisis, like so many others in the past, may be an opportunity for the sector to move beyond ad hoc changes to more sustained reform.

Jessica Alexander

The New Humanitarian

16 July 2020

Invest more in predicting the future to be better prepared, say experts

More funding should be focused on technology projects dealing with issues such as climate change to further improve communities' resilience and disaster preparedness. With more funding directed to these projects, actors will be able to better grasp complex, multi-hazard scenarios.

Luis Burón B.

UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

28 July 2020

Southeast Asia has a chance to build back better post-pandemic

While Southeast Asia's response to the coronavirus pandemic has been efficient overall, issues such as data privacy and inadequate resources for migrant populations still need to be addressed.

Samira Sadeque

Inter Press Service News Agency

31 July 2020

ADB, UNDP sign agreement to boost disaster recovery in Asia Pacific

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have signed an agreement to strengthen the disaster recovery capacity of certain countries. Strengthening measures include focusing on infrastructure-related sectors and improving financial preparedness.

Asian Development Bank

7 August 2020

AFP: No militarization of COVID-19 response

The chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines has assured the public that while the army has been actively involved in the response to COVID-19, there is no militarisation of the response. As per its mandate, the army has always been involved in HADR operations.

Romina Cabrera

The Philippine Star

10 August 2020

Improving communities resilience to natural disasters through DRR awareness

The National Emergency Management Office has been conducting outreach programs as part of its annual awareness program to improve communities' resilience to natural disasters. This program will also help communities to formulate their disaster risk management committees and plans.

Ministry of Meteorology

Government of Tonga

13 August 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19 July update

The Global Humanitarian Response Plan aggregates relevant COVID-19 appeals, and complements other plans such as those developed by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It also includes inputs from NGOs and NGO consortiums and seeks to convey local actors' perspectives and roles in the response.

UN OCHA

2020

Make or break – The implications of Covid-19 for crisis financing

This study reflects on what the COVID-19 pandemic response tells us about the resilience of the international crisis financing system. Crises provide opportunities for policy makers as ideas that were once politically inconceivable become mainstream, forgotten policy proposals are revisited, and neglected issues are suddenly prioritised.

Norwegian Refugee Council

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Fireside Chat: Re-Imagining the Humanitarian Landscape in a Post COVID World

This fireside chat explored the effects of concurrent pandemic-disaster responses, and how they threaten states and societies in the Indo-Pacific region. It also discussed the potential challenges of dual crises on societies and vulnerable populations.

Recorded Webinar

1 August 2020

Responding to Emergencies in the Shadow of Coronavirus

Despite being in the midst of a global pandemic, MSF doctors and staff have continued to face their usual challenges in the field. This webinar highlighted these issues, with presentations from medical practitioners Bhargavi Rao, Marc Wilkinson and Lilli-Marie Wangari on their work.

Recorded Webinar

4 August 2020

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

COVID-19 fuels tensions between Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi hosts

There has been a rise in anti-Rohingya distrust and stigmatisation since the outbreak of COVID-19. The outbreak is becoming a catalyst for tensions, reflecting the growing resentment of the local population since the influx of refugees in 2017.

AZM Anas

The New Humanitarian

27 July 2020

COVID-19 is accelerating maritime insecurity in Southeast Asia

The COVID-19 outbreak has led to perceptions of weakness on the part of states. Non-state actors are exploiting the crisis such as organised violence leading to an increase in displaced people, including pushing migrants out to sea.

Asyura Salleh

Channel News Asia

28th July 2020

Movement should be safe for migrants; not profitable for smugglers

With legal migration increasingly restricted due to COVID-19 measures, migrants have been increasingly relying on smugglers. Governments of receiving and sending countries should collaborate to create measures that do not increase the profits of human smugglers or contribute to corruption.

Lucia Bird

Institute for Security Studies

4 August 2020

Coronavirus: Crowded dorms putting domestic helpers at risk of infection, advocates say, as second worker confirmed positive

Crowded dormitories for domestic workers have put them at risk of contracting COVID-19. As Hong Kong faces its third wave, there are calls for the government to take more active steps, beyond providing free masks and testing to those in the dormitories.

Kathleen Magramo

South China Morning Post

7 August 2020

Asia-Pacific to bear the brunt of COVID-19 crisis, may see \$31.4-54.3 billion remittance losses: ADB

According to the ADB, the Asia-Pacific, accounting for one-third of the global migrant workforce, is set to face significant remittance losses. With people already feeling the pinch, governments must come up with policy measures to reduce the fallout as soon as possible.

PTI

Financial Express

9 August 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

ICC COVID-19 response: COVID-19 guidance for the protection of migrants

This piece contains suggested employer guidance measures to protect migrant workers, a crucial part of the global workforce, during this pandemic. These guidelines also address their specific vulnerabilities.

International Chamber of Commerce and International Organization for Migration

2020

Policy brief: COVID-19 and people on the move

The impact of the COVID-19 has been disproportionately hard on groups who were already vulnerable, including irregular migrants. This brief presents COVID-19's threefold impact on these groups, as a health crisis, a socio-economic crisis and a protection crisis.

United Nations

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Migration and Development: Revisiting the Migration Hump

This webinar discussed the effects of economic development on international migration. It discusses the "hump" effect, in which efforts to increase development in poor countries through development assistance by donor countries would eventually translate into more emigration.

Recorded Webinar

24 June 2020

Migration Methodologies: Challenges, Innovations and Conceptual Implications for Asian Migrations

This workshop aims to deliberate on innovative methodological approaches to migration flows within as well as into and out of Asia.

Singapore

30 November 2020 – 1 December 2020