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Human security imperiled: Charting the long road to recovery in post-COVID world



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WE usher in 2021 scarred by the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had in 2020 that cost millions of lives worldwide and resulted in a severe global economic recession. While we see light at the end of the tunnel with the rapid production and roll out of COVID-19 vaccines, the situation remains grim. We started 2021 much like in 2020—with lockdowns and border closures.

COVID-19 has indeed been the crisis of a generation. This makes the task of dealing with its severe and multi-dimensional consequences no less urgent as it is complex and challenging. Setting the agenda for recovery would first require a comprehensive account of the extent that COVID-19 has imperiled human security. One year since the pandemic outbreak, COVID-19 continues to rage, exacting a high toll on human life. To date, there are more than 100 million

COVID-19 cases globally, with over 2 million deaths. These numbers are expected to grow as countries around the world grapple to contain the pandemic.

The economic impact of the pandemic has been devastating, with deep and long-lasting consequences. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), COVID-19 [wiped out 81 million jobs](#) in the Asia-Pacific, resulting in more people becoming impoverished. The [World Bank reported](#) a rise in global poverty in 2020, with 115 million more people falling into extreme poverty and is expected to grow 150 million in 2021. The severe economic downturn has also resulted in an increase in the number of people becoming food insecure. The Food and Agriculture Organisation’s (FAO) [State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020](#) noted that there were 100 million more undernourished peo-

ple in 2020. This is on top of the estimated 135 million people already facing acute hunger pre-COVID-19, according to the [Global Report on Food Crises 2020](#).

COVID-19 has raised critical questions about the prospects for human security and human development, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. [The Social Progress Index](#) indicates that unless the impact of COVID-19 is mitigated, the realisation of SDGs will be pushed back more than 50 years to 2082. Aside from seriously setting back the SDGs of poverty reduction and zero hunger, the pandemic has further widened social and economic inequalities, created an education crisis, and hit the most vulnerable groups hardest – the poor, women, the youth, and the ethnic minorities. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) found that a third of the world's school children - [463 million globally - were affected](#) when the pandemic forced school closures and where remote learning was

not possible.

Recovery therefore is going to be particularly difficult given the enormity of the challenges ahead. Although economic projections for 2021 reflect a rebound for Asia, much of positive forecasts put a lot of weight on the production and rollout of vaccines. Yet, many developing countries in Asia, including Southeast Asia, have been disadvantaged by the ability of richer countries to reserve most of the initial supply of vaccines. This further aggravates inequality and further widens the gulf between rich and poor societies.

The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for global solidarity to ensure fair access to safe and effective vaccines for everyone, stressing that “no one is safe until all are safe”. He also urged the international community to turn the global crisis into an opportunity to transform the world, build back better, and speed up the transition to green energy while growing economies particularly those of developing countries. He

further implored richer countries to help poorer ones that are severely affected by COVID-19 and the economic recession.

Indeed, while challenges persist in advancing global solidarity, the significance of regional cooperation cannot be ignored. In Asia, regional cooperation matters – providing the critical pathways in promoting international and multilateral cooperation. ASEAN and the ASEAN-led institutions like the ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit have proved to be important platforms in filling in the gaps in global health governance and helped build state capacity in containing the pandemic. Moving forward, regional cooperation will become even more crucial in dealing with the difficult tasks of economic recovery while ensuring a safer and more resilient environment.

Suggested Readings

- Deloitte, 2020, 'Singapore improves its Access to Advanced Education and Environment Quality, according to the Social Progress Index 2020', 24 September, Singapore, <https://www2.deloitte.com/sg/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/social-progress-index-results.html>
- FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2020, 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI)', Rome, FAO, <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/CA9692EN.pdf>
- ILO, 2020, 'Asia–Pacific Employment and Social Outlook: Navigating the crisis towards a human-centred future of work 2020', Bangkok: ILO, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_764084.pdf
- UNICEF, 2020, 'COVID-19: At least a third of the world's schoolchildren unable to access remote learning during school closures, new report says', 27 August, Press Release, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-least-third-worlds-schoolchildren-unable-access-remote-learning-during>
- Work Bank, 2020, 'COVID-19 to Add as Many as 150 Million Extreme Poor by 2021', 7 October, Press Release, https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/07/covid-19-to-add-as-many-as-150-million-extreme-poor-by-2021?cid=EXT_WBEmailShare_EXT

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Climate crisis last on agenda in G20 summit conclusion

In the G20 Riyadh Declaration, addressing the climate and environmental crises came behind other challenges, such as finding solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic, rebuilding the economy and improving global inequalities.

Daisy Dunne

The Independent

23 November 2020

Decarbonisation on a finite planet

Decarbonisation is not happening in a vacuum but on a planet already replete with ecological challenges. Low-carbon transitions are material-intensive and generate waste. Existing pressures point to an urgent need to reduce consumption to avert climate and ecological crises.

Margareth Sembiring

RSIS Commentary

25 November 2020

World is set to exhaust carbon budget in 10 years

The world has 8% of carbon budget left, which will be exhausted in the coming decade at current emission rates. Any rise beyond this budget would mean that average global temperatures would go over 1.5 deg C at the turn of the century.

Disha Shetty

Forbes

11 December 2020

Insider: 4 key topics climate negotiators must resolve by COP26

Some issues could make or break the negotiation outcomes of COP26 in 2021: finalising the rules of the Paris Agreement, building resilience and addressing loss and damage, financing climate action, and transitioning of the decade of ambition.

Yamide Dagnet, et al.

World Resources Institute

11 December 2020

China biodegradable plastics 'failing to solve pollution crisis'

A massive increase in biodegradable plastic production in China is outpacing the country's ability to degrade the materials. Most biodegradable plastics require specific industrial treatment at high temperatures to be degraded within six months.

Joel Gunter

BBC News

17 December 2020

Water security a top priority in COVID-19 recovery, says ADB

In Asia Pacific, 1.5 billion people living in rural areas and 600 million in urban areas still lack adequate water supply and sanitation. Water access, sanitation, and hygiene are the primary line of defence against spread of COVID-19 and other diseases.

Asian Development Bank

18 December 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Emissions gap report 2020

Emissions in 2020 will be lower than in 2019 due to the COVID-19 crisis and responses, but GHG concentrations in the atmosphere continue to rise, with the immediate reduction in emissions expected to have a negligible long-term impact on climate change.

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi: UNEP

2020

The production gap report: 2020 special report

To follow a 1.5°C-consistent pathway, the world will need to decrease fossil fuel production by roughly 6% per year between 2020 and 2030. Countries are instead planning and projecting an average annual increase of 2%.

SEI, IISD, ODI, E3G, and UNEP

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Climate Ambition Summit 2020

The Summit was a monumental step on the road to COP26 in November 2021. In the Summit, countries set out new and ambitious commitments under the three pillars of the Paris Agreement: mitigation, adaptation and finance commitments.

Recorded Summit

12 December 2020

World Water Day

World Water Day is about what water means to people, its true value and how we can better protect this vital resource.

Worldwide

22 March 2021

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

In draft document, Philippines lowers carbon emissions reduction target

A draft text of its first Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) shows the Philippines aiming to reduce carbon emissions by only 30% by 2040, a target lower than the one it gave in 2015 and for a longer period of time.

Pia Ranada
Rappler

26 December 2020

Trial to import electricity from Malaysia a 'useful first step' as Singapore prepares to connect with regional grid: Experts

With the trial coming after the recent announcement on the Laos-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project (LTMS-PIP), power connectivity among ASEAN members would be the "ultimate goal".

Matthew Mohan
Channel News Asia

1 January 2021

Japan's carbon neutrality dilemma: More nuclear power or more renewables?

While the government's official policy is to restart as many nuclear reactors as possible, doing that could prove difficult for four basic reasons: the need for safety upgrades, aging reactors that face decommissioning, the storage of nuclear waste, and growing expectations for renewable energy.

Eric Johnston
The Japan Times

4 January 2021

Coal demand has seen its biggest drop since World War II. But it's not all good news

Growing use of renewables, declining natural gas prices, falling energy demand due to the pandemic, and rising awareness of the urgent need to cut emissions could signal the end of rising coal demand in the US and Europe. But demand for coal from some of the burgeoning economies of Asia continues to rise.

Johnny Wood
World Economic Forum

6 January 2021

Environmentalists make a case for leaving fossil fuels in the ground

Environmental experts argue that economic, climate and healthcare crises necessitate the move toward developing cleaner energy sources, environmentally friendly jobs and healthier communities.

Reuters
Channel News Asia

13 January 2021

China 'must power up nuclear plans' to meet carbon neutral targets

China missed its targets because Beijing did not approve any new reactors from 2016 to 2018 in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in Japan and slow progress in the development of third-generation reactors – Westinghouse's AP1000 technology and China's Hualong One design.

Echo Xie
South China Morning Post

13 January 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Advances in small modular reactor technology developments

This booklet provides the latest data and information on small modular reactors around the world, including detailed descriptions of 72 reactors under development or construction in 18 countries.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Vienna: IAEA

2020

Fostering a blue economy: Offshore renewable energy

This report studies the status and prospects of offshore renewable sources and recommends critical actions to hasten their development. Such sources can stimulate new industries and generate jobs in line with the global energy transition.

International Renewable Energy Agency

Abu Dhabi: IRENA

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The International Nuclear Security Forum Launch

The Forum aims to provide a foundation for international multi-stakeholder engagement in reducing nuclear security threats.

Recorded Webinar

17 December 2020

WEO Week: Getting to Net Zero

An increasing number of countries and companies have committed to reaching net zero emissions, many of them by 2050, using the International Energy Agency's Sustainable Development Scenario and the new Net Zero Emissions by 2050 case. This session examined what more needs to happen to put the world on track.

Recorded Webinar

19 November 2020

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Covid pandemic would lead to food insecurity; govt, businesses need to work together: Report

The COVID-19 pandemic can result into a financial crisis and a rise in food insecurity. Businesses and governments must work together to not only get through the crisis but also build resilience for the future.

Sachin Dave

The Economic Times

14 December 2020

How the effects of COVID-19 could cause food insecurity until 2050

COVID-19 is estimated to push 150 million people around the world into extreme poverty by 2021. However, preparations for COVID-19 coincide with preparations for addressing climate change, making it harder to promote the latter.

Anuradha Varanas

State of the Planet

18 December 2020

COVID-19 risk in food value chains: Post-webinar coverage

Amid COVID-19, regional and local systems, especially in food-deficit countries, have faced growing challenges from diminished purchasing power, disruptions to domestic supply chains, and higher food import costs due to rising global prices.

S. Gustafson

Food Security Portal

21 December 2020

COVID-19: A year on - dark clouds/silver linings, turning to local production to ensure food security

Diversification of food sources may be less effective in the face of global supply shocks, as countries go into lockdown. Increasing local food production is important in preparing for the post-COVID-19 normal.

Audrey Tan

The Straits Times

31 December 2020

COVID-19 caused food insecurity to soar, but climate change will be much worse

COVID-19 has impacted food production, procurement and distribution. However, it is only a precursor of what climate change will mean for food security, emphasizing the need for more sustainable food production methods amid changing environments.

Cormac O'Brien and Thin Lei Win

World Economic Forum

6 January 2021

Nograla recalibrates 'zero hunger' goals due to Covid-19

Hunger incidence in the Philippines doubled from 8.8% to 16% and even reaching 30% at some point during the pandemic. The country is recalibrating its 2021 food insecurity target to keep hunger incidence at the pre-COVID level of 8.8%.

Christine Cudis

Philippine News Agency

11 January 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Deciphering the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on food security, agriculture, and livelihoods: A review of the evidence from developing countries

This paper performs a comprehensive assessment of the effect of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture, and suggests coping and mitigation mechanisms to sustain livelihoods, e.g., decentralising food systems and fair trade policy, among others.

Endashaw Worki, et al.

Current Research in Environmental Sustainability,

Vol. 2

2020

COVID-19 economic and food security implications for Indonesia

The prices of most strategic commodities have increased since October 2020, with the exception of rice. However, challenges remain in the supply chain of nutritious yet highly perishable food items.

Saidamon Bodamaev et al.,

World Food Programme

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

COVID-19 and Food Safety Control and Management

The joint FAO-WHO webinar shared information and experiences on how food safety management, control, and attitudes have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This facilitated the sharing of lessons learned in Europe and Central Asia and discussion on the work of FAO and WHO in the region.

Recorded Webinar

16 December 2020

Towards the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit: An enhanced Africa-Europe partnership on sustainable agriculture

Africa and Europe have a shared interest in accelerating work on the global agenda for sustainable development and facing together the pandemic as well as the climate and environmental emergency. The COVID-19 crisis is exposing the "lack of resilience on the fundamentals of life" and the urgency to rethink the common futures of Africa and Europe.

Recorded Webinar

3 December 2020

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

New coronavirus variant: what do we know?

The rapid spread of a new variant of coronavirus has been blamed for the introduction of strict tier four mixing rules for millions of people, harsher restrictions on mixing at Christmas in England, Scotland and Wales, and other countries placing the UK on a travel ban.

James Gallagher

BBC

20 December 2020

The mutated virus is a ticking time bomb

A more transmissible variant of COVID-19 is a potential catastrophe in and of itself and could, in some ways, be much more dangerous than a more severe variant.

Zeynep Tufekci

The Atlantic

1 January 2021

Japan finds new COVID virus strain, distinct from UK and Africa types

A new variant of the virus behind COVID-19 has been detected in Japan. While there are similarities to strains first reported in the U.K. and South Africa, this particular type does not appear to have been spotted before.

Nikkei Asia

10 January 2021

Tech, health firms team up on digital vaccination certificates

A coalition of technology firms and health organisations announced plans for a digital vaccination certificate, which can be used on smartphones to show evidence of inoculation for COVID-19.

AFP

Channel News Asia

14 January 2021

COVID-19 in Southeast Asia: Regional pandemic preparedness matters

As the fight to contain COVID-19 continues, the Southeast Asian story of pandemic preparedness and response provides useful insights on what can be done better to avoid some of the serious policy missteps in the future.

Mely Caballero-Anthony

Brookings

14 January 2021

WHO convenes emergency committee early over COVID-19 virus variants

The World Health Organization's (WHO) emergency committee met to discuss the new coronavirus variants from South Africa and Britain that have rapidly spread to at least 50 countries and sparked widespread alarm.

AFP

Channel News Asia

14 January 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Infection fatality rate of COVID-19 inferred from seroprevalence data

This study aims to estimate the infection fatality rate of COVID-19 from seroprevalence data. The rate tended to be much lower than estimates made earlier in the pandemic.

John P A Loannidis

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 1
2021

Ensuring equitable access to vaccines for refugees and migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic

As COVID-19 vaccines are expected to become available soon, ensuring equitable distribution among countries will be a key challenge.

Jozef Bartovic et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 1
2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

RSIS Webinar by Dr Khor Swee Kheng: The Science, Politics and Geopolitics of the Covid-19 Vaccine

Multiple recent announcements of successful COVID-19 vaccine trials have raised expectations of a rapid end to the pandemic. This webinar dissected the science, politics and geopolitics behind the most monumental mass vaccination programme in the history of humanity.

Recorded Webinar

15 December 2020

Solutions for COVID-19 Pandemic Control: Vaccines and Beyond

This webinar reviewed opportunities and challenges facing the development and application of the new technologies and products for controlling COVID-19 pandemic, discussed the strategies and measures which have been implemented, shared lessons learned, and offered future directions from broad perspectives.

Recorded Webinar

13 January 2021

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

'Play to Learn' humanitarian response introduces Rohingya muppets to Sesame Street

Part of the not-for-profit's Play to Learn humanitarian initiative that reaches Rohingya children through a partnership with NGOs, this Sesame Workshop programme aims to protect refugee families from long-term, long-range consequences by providing a basic educational need for children up to the age of six.

Roya Sabri
Triple Pundit

24 December 2020

The year in humanitarian news

This article presents some of the key humanitarian events that have taken place in 2020 and how they have been affected by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Titilope Ajayi
The New Humanitarian

30 December 2020

Aid policy trends to watch in 2021

While COVID-19 be a historic turning point for significant reform in the humanitarian space, this is unlikely to happen in the short term. Potential areas of interest to watch for in 2021 include the intersection of social protection programmes and humanitarian aid, the shift away from multilateralism, diversity in international aid, and potential future crises akin to COVID-19.

Ben Parker & Jessica Alexander
The New Humanitarian

4 January 2021

Philippines: Munti inaugurates state-of-the-art disaster resilience mobile learning hub, first in NCR

The local government of Muntinlupa in the Philippines launched the Mobile Learning Hub, the first innovative roving 'learning bus' in Metro Manila. By providing users with a virtual reality experience of disaster scenarios, it aims to teach disaster resilience.

Margo Hannah De Guzman Quadra
Good News Pilipinas

6 January 2021

ASEAN achieves a milestone towards regional disaster risk reduction

Recently adopted by ASEAN, the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2021-2025 is in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and its focus on improving multi-hazard risk governance

Omar H Amach
United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction - Regional Office for Asia and Pacific

11 January 2021

2020: The year when crises converged

In 2020, the Asia-Pacific region has seen more complex scenarios with the added complication of COVID-19 into the already crowded regional disaster landscape. The disaster management and public health systems' capacity to respond to the new climate-health-disaster nexus will be key to the recovery.

Sanjay Srivastava, Madhurima Sarkar-Swaigood et. al
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

15 January 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Machine-learning methods for identifying social media-based requests for urgent help during hurricanes

This study considers whether it is possible to successfully extract information useful to first responders from public tweets during a hurricane.

Ashwin Devaraj, Dhiraj Murthy, and Aman Dontula
IJDRR , Vol. 51

2020

Social capital for flood disaster management: Case study of flooding in a village of Bengawan Solo Riverbank, Tuban, East Java Province

This study aims to describe the effectiveness of social capital in the management of flood disasters in Bengawan Solo Riverbank area in Plumpang, Tuban and the problems faced in managing the flood.

Rustinsyah Rustinsyah, Ratna Azis Prasetyo, and Muhammad Adib.
IJDRR , Vol. 52

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

High-Level Event on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action

This webinar shared lessons learned and examined the systemic challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for collective action on data responsibility. The discussion featured experts from across the humanitarian system and highlighted strategies for data responsibility in practice.

Recorded Webinar

18 December 2020

ARMOR Webinar - Early Warning System of ASEAN: Challenges and Innovations

The ARMOR 2nd Edition Webinar Series #2 will provide insights from experts on how early warning systems will become important tools to reduce risks related to floods and droughts, and what else can be done to better anticipate them to allow for early action.

Webinar

28 January 2021

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

2020 in review: Migration and forced displacement

COVID-19's inhibition of global mobility in 2020 seems to have been driven by more restrictive migration policies and a greater disregard for the human rights of migrants around the world. They face increased xenophobia as well as a reduction in economic opportunities.

Eric Reidy
The New Humanitarian

22 December 2020

Displaced, stranded, unprotected: ASEAN's migrant workers

As part of the response to COVID-19, governments in ASEAN implemented a range of travel restrictions. However, these restrictions disproportionately affected millions of low-wage migrant workers in the region, exposing the structural vulnerabilities they face.

Geoffrey Ducanes, Puja Dutta and Nicola Nixon
The Diplomat

23 December 2020

Indonesia's new placement fee plan to protect migrant workers

The Indonesian government has passed an "exemption of placement fee policy" for workers in 10 job sectors including domestic workers and caregivers. As such, the burden of paying placement fees are no longer borne by the workers, but instead their employers. This policy is part of a 2017 law on migrant worker protection.

Arlina Arshad
The Straits Times

27 December 2020

Thailand offers work permits to undocumented migrants to curb COVID-19

In an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19 among undocumented migrants, Thailand has said it would allow them to work in the country legally for 2 years. However, they have to be registered first by their employers before mid-February in order to receive these permits.

Nanchanok Wongsamuth
Reuters

29 December 2020

South Asia could see 40 million climate migrants by 2030

With millions already being displaced by disasters, this number could increase to 62.9 million by 2050 unless significant action is taken immediately to mitigate the impacts of climate change. It is not just the countries which must take action, the onus should be on richer countries to provide support to developing countries.

Soumya Sarkar
Eco-Business

29 December 2020

Climate-smart farming for western Nepal villages eases migration pressure

Nepal has launched a smart agriculture programme in order to mitigate the problems caused by climate change being endured by farmers in their villages. By ensuring their villages become "climate smart", they are able to continue farming instead of migrating for work elsewhere.

Aadesh Subedi
Reuters

6 January 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Integrating migration into the COVID-19 response: A toolkit for development partners

This report analyses and suggests ways in which migration and sustainable development interact in the context of COVID-19.

International Organisation for Migration
Paris: IOM

2020

Pacific Island Countries in the era of COVID 19: Macroeconomic impacts and job prospects

The global travel restrictions and lockdowns that were implemented as a response to the spread of COVID-19 have had serious impacts on international labour mobility and livelihoods across the Pacific. This report looks at the labour market impact in the regions and suggests potential measures to mitigate these losses by taking advantage of changing employment trends.

Romeo Araham, et al.
Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Humanitarianisms: Migration and Care through the Global South

This webinar looks at the history of forced migrations within and across the Global South. It seeks to de-center migration and de-colonise humanitarianism by discussing how colonial-era efforts to regulate and control migrants became central to later systems of managing displacement in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Recorded Webinar

3 December 2020

International Forum on Migration Statistics 2020

The Forum is expected to foster an informal global migration data network, aimed at promoting exchanges of information among a broad range of stakeholders.

OECD, IOM and UNDESA

20–21 January 2021