



## Fairer world for a healthier and safer world

### Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) marked the celebration of world health day on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April this year with the theme, “building a fairer, healthier world for everyone”. [1] The theme brings to the forefront some very pertinent issues especially in regard to the current covid 19 pandemic situation the world is struggling with. The current Covid 19 pandemic has magnified the stark inequalities in our world. Some people are able to live healthier lives and have better access to health services while others struggle to make ends meet with little daily income, poor housing conditions and loss or disrupted education, fewer employment opportunities, experience greater gender inequality, and have little or no access to safe environments, clean water and air, food security and health services. [1]

### Unequal world

The Covid 19 pandemic has hit the world hard, but has hit the poorer countries, underserved communities and families and vulnerable individuals the hardest. It has decimated the gains made in health and economic development made so far and is pushing families and communities into poverty and further socio-economic disadvantages while increasing the number of premature deaths and avoidable illnesses and hospitalizations. Globally, as of 3:24pm CEST, 29 May 2021, there have been 169,118,995 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 3,519,175 deaths, reported to World Health Organization (WHO). [2]

The pandemic is estimated to have driven between 119 and 124 million more people into extreme poverty last year and there is convincing evidence that it has widened gender gaps in employment, with women exiting the labor force in greater numbers than men over the past 12 months. [3] More than 1 billion people living in informal

settlements or slums are facing increased challenges in preventing infection and transmission of the coronavirus [4]

### Dangers ahead

Given the level of world globalization, this pandemic will continue to remain a major threat to not just poorer countries but also the high-income countries and the developed world, not just epidemiologically but also economically and socio-politically. On one hand globalization has led to the rapid spread of this pandemic and on the other hand international policy measures to contain the pandemic such as air travel restrictions, border closures, enforcements of quarantine and limited mobility etc... have disrupted international and local trade and commerce and have dealt a severe blow to economies dependent on tourism, export of minerals and oil and other commodities leading to rising unemployment, food insecurity and extreme poverty. For the first time in 20 years, global poverty levels are predicted to rise and hinder the progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. [5] This pandemic has given rise to socio-economic tensions between countries and within countries. This pandemic is not just a health emergency, but also a socio-political and economic emergency with the potential to threaten world peace and stability. The world economic forum in its global risks report 2021 has stated that the global economy will be threatened by the knock-on effects of the coronavirus crisis, while geopolitical stability will be critically fragile over the next 5 to 10 years. [6] It is in this regard the WHO call for actions to eliminate the health and social inequalities assume significant importance.

### Way forward

Equity / health equity is defined as the absence of avoidable, unfair or remediable differences (in health) among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically,

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geographically or by other means [7]. Ensuring equity / health equity is a fundamental human right and is central to achieving the sustainable developmental goals (SDGs). The WHO campaign for 2021 for building a fairer and healthier world, urges leaders to monitor and track health inequities and its root causes, work together and hand in hand with affected communities and individuals, and tackle inequalities and to ensure that all people are able to access quality health services when and where they need them. The social and health inequalities exposed by COVID-19 have led to renewed interest by Member States in WHO's work on social determinants of health and the recent resolution adopted by the world health assembly aims to strengthen action globally and within countries on the social determinants of health; to reduce health inequities by involving all sectors in taking concrete action to improve living conditions and reduce social inequalities; and improve monitoring of social determinants and health inequities. [8]

The WHO urges leaders to act beyond borders in ensuring an equitable supply of vaccines, tests and treatments. Prioritizing health spending and strengthening primary health care is vital to providing universal access to quality health care and quality covid care and make the health system resilient to future pandemics. The WHO recommends spending an additional 1 % of GDP on primary health care and structuring social protection schemes to mitigate the negative social impacts of Covid 19 pandemic. Building safer, healthier and inclusive neighborhoods and ensuring the availability of timely and accurate data are key to removing the barriers to an equitable and sustainable society. [3]

The focus should be now to stem the pandemic and rebuild and restructure the health systems to make it fairer for everyone. Also, there is need to reinforce trust between governments/organizations and society during this crisis and to do that we need to guarantee social accountability, transparency in the systems and provide safety nets for the marginalized and underserved groups who have been greatly affected by the pandemic. Confidence building measures to ensure widespread community participation in covid control measures remains vital.

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Dr. C. K. Priyanka Raj 

Deputy Editor-In-Chief, IJMSNR,  
Associate Professor,  
Department of Public Health and Epidemiology,  
National University of Science & Technology,  
College of Medicine and Health Sciences,  
Sohar, Al Batinah North, Sultanate of Oman.  
Email ID: [priyankaraj@nu.edu.om](mailto:priyankaraj@nu.edu.om)

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