

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Stay at home: Coronavirus (COVID-19), isolationism and the future of globalization

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**The novel Corona Virus (Covid-19) is creating havoc in the world. It is causing greatest damage to the health and economic fabrics of societies with considerable impact on individuals, families, communities, and nations in unprecedented scale. At the same time countries are taking desperate measures to curb its spread and limit its negative consequences. Some of these measures include stay at home and closed door policies. The objective of this paper is to argue that while these policies can reduce the spread of the virus and saves lives, the unintended consequences in terms of inappropriate use of time, psycho-emotional distress, and loss of livelihoods on one hand and shrinking international or inter-state cooperation and declining trend of globalization, on the other hand, will be incalculable. Given the recent arrival of the complex social, political and economic problems associated with the virus, our knowledge about the scale and directions of these problems is yet to emerge. Using the critical observation and analysis methods, the various implications of the pandemic are highlighted throughout the discussion. The concluding section of the paper calls for a continuous and comprehensive research to generate relevant policy recommendations on constructive responses to the short and long term consequences of Covid-19 and its impacts on individuals, families, communities and the future of globalization.**

**Key words:** Covid-19, solidarity, international cooperation, globalization, developing countries.

## INTRODUCTION

The world is grappling with unprecedented levels of crises encompassing all sectors of life: health, economy, social life, religion, politics, and international relations. At the root of these complex challenges facing the world is the invisible virus called Coronavirus (Covid-19) from Wuhan, China, which, in a space of three to four months, spread across the globe infecting more than 8.7 million and killing thousands of people in different countries (WHO, June 2020). The countries being worst hit by the pandemic, at the time of writing the final draft of this

paper, include USA, Brazil, Russia, India, UK and Spain. China and South Korea are reported to have curbed the spread of the virus and reduced its impact on society and economy significantly. Moreover, China has emerged as a provider of medical and technological support to other countries, notably to the largest victims of the Covid-19, Italy, Spain, the US and other European countries to help respond to the disaster. In addition, China, through the billionaire Jack Ma, is shipping tons of medical equipment and supplies to a number of African countries which

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were caught by this monstrous disease quite unprepared.

Africa has received the virus relatively late; and both infection and fatality rates are considerably low. But this is not time for complacency as the number of cases is growing rapidly. It is also important to note that while the developed countries with 'advanced' health care systems and well-trained health workers are unable to cope with the carnage of Covid-19, Africa, with very poor health systems, fragile economies and abject poverty, will find it exceedingly difficult to tackle the pandemic. More frustrating, when it comes to Africa, the low level of literacy and lack of awareness, among the majority of the population regarding the mode of transmission of the virus, methods of prevention and limited understanding of the magnitude of the imminent destruction, once it penetrates deep into heavily populated urban and rural communities. Though governments are trying to educate people through mass media, random observation of public interactions on streets, market places, transport stations and religious establishments reveal that there is no significant behavioral change at individual, household and community levels. This means, when the virus grows into a full blown pandemic, Africa could likely suffer the greatest blows unseen in its history.

The argument advanced in this paper is that aside from individual and family tragedies that we are witnessing around the world, the impact of Covid-19 on the future of globalization and international relations will be far-reaching. Based on observations and information from the international media of all sorts, the paper outlines three critical issues resulting from the policy of isolationism in a desperate effort to reduce the spread of the virus. These include (a) its impact on individuals, families, communities and nations; (b) implication for international and interstate interactions; and (c) the future of globalization. The discussion is presented in that order.

### **Objectives**

The overall aim of this paper is to pinpoint major areas of concern for research and knowledge generation on the scale and severity of ongoing and emerging challenges facing individuals, families, communities and nations following the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The specific objectives of the study include:

- (1) To discuss the immediate and long-term effects of the stay at home policies adopted by countries and regions;
- (2) To identify the implications of isolationism on interstate and international relations, and
- (3) To outline the possible consequences of closed-door and closed-border regimes on the future of globalization.

The ultimate purpose of the paper is to motivate others, academics, researchers and policy or decision-makers, to undertake their own studies on the wide-range of issues that the Novel Corona Virus has unfolded since its

emergence three to four months ago.

This paper thus suggests some key conclusions and suggestions including the need for continued monitoring and analyses of the situations as time go on.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methods employed in this study include observation, interpretative and context-analysis. This is one of the few attempts at explaining actual and potential implications of the Covid-19 pandemic at international scale. As such, it is not possible to obtain relevant literature and statistical data. This is the characteristic of emerging global issues and will take time to have comprehensive information on the subject. However, this could soon be resolved as more and more scholars could be engaged in generating data and analyzing the short and long term implications of the Covid pandemic. Therefore, It is hoped that the present study will contribute to future studies aimed at understanding the multiple consequences of the stay at home regime on individuals, families and nations, especially on the pace of globalization and inter-state collaboration.

In this regard, those who wish to do so are encouraged to conduct their own empirical studies on the various themes touched throughout the paper.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The impact of staying at home on individuals, families, communities and nations**

Millions of workers, students, business operators, and travellers in many countries have been told to stay at home. The purpose of the stay at home advice, which later turned out to be a coercive order in many countries, is to keep people away from each other and reduce the spread of the virus through physical contacts. The underlying assumption is that physical distance, coupled with personal hygiene, could prevent new infections so that hospitals could deal with patients already affected by the virus. In a situation where little is known about the virus and where no biomedical cure, other than treatment and care, exists, limiting physical contact and encouraging preventive social and cultural practices are believed to respond to the pandemic and return to the state of normalcy. These measures have their own strengths and limitations, which are outlined in the following paragraph.

On the positive side, the stay at home measure will save millions of lives and billions of dollars because prevention has always been the best remedy for most diseases including new viral outbreaks. In the first place, people will remain healthy in the fullest sense of the term: physically, mentally and emotionally, if they stay away from close contacts and large gatherings which have immense potentials to spread viral infections. Needless to state that individuals and families who are enjoying good health will contribute to rapid recovery and faster economic growth, when the battle against the Covid-19 is won; and this is inevitable no matter how long it will take

to do so.

In the second place, individuals and families staying at home will have more time for personal reflections, creative thinking and engaging in something meaningful to them now that they have plenty of time for themselves, though they have to discharge their work related responsibilities from home. It may be possible that people who do not have time for personal growth because of routine office work, traffic jam and other factors will have the opportunity to do what is best for them under the present situations. In the third place, maybe for the first time in many years, families will be at home together. Children will stay with parents and couples could stay together for days or months. This could enable family members to reclaim 'lost' family times and their collective enjoyment, perhaps under one roof, in close interaction and consultation with one another, including reflections on their future. At the same time, they could use this relatively longer time to plan and conduct some of their unfinished family or household affairs. Parents could tutor their children. The latter could help each other or their parents in different activities and make life easier. Most importantly, working family members could use part of their time indoors to take care of the sick, elderly and persons living with disabilities, where these exist. Individuals and families could also save money that could have been spent on fuels, transport costs, eating out at places of work, or recreation outside after work hours. Studies usually reveal that, thousands of family breakdown cases are associated with drinking habits and staying away from home during off-hours or weekends.

In light of the foregoing, the Covid-19 induced stay at home policy could have direct and indirect benefits to individuals, households, and maybe, nations indirectly because a nation of happy and satisfied individuals and families will be a healthy and productive nation.

However, the actual consequences of stay at home cannot be entirely rosy. In this regard, it is important to outline some of the problems associated with staying at home involuntarily. The first and most important challenge to individuals and families is managing time. People who are used to working in structured and controlled environments, in both public and private sectors, would find it difficult to adjust to sudden changes in their work spaces and schedules. It is not easy to shift to new plans and manage time for different activities. Some would think that they have now abundant free time at their disposal. They may forget to ration time between personal enjoyment and discharging their duties virtually. The struggle between enjoying ones 'free' time at home and observing work ethics through self-discipline will be intense. This could lead to psycho-emotional tensions for a good number of people everywhere. However, this does not mean that all workers who are staying at home will spend their time uselessly. It is difficult to make such a gross generalization on this issue without adequate empirical evidence, but this will surely be the case among

the majority of the population staying at home, especially the less experienced youth and unskilled workers.

Therefore, while countries, communities, corporations, families and individuals are waging war against the pandemic, they also need to do something to help workers staying at home to make the best use of their time. The role of the media in this task will be quite essential. As much as their active engagement in creating awareness about the mode of transmission and prevention of this deadly virus, the media can also involve in educating people about the irretrievability of time. Moreover, the communication strategy designed to prevent the spread of the virus should also have messages about proper use of time at home. No doubt, this would appear paternalistic at best, and interventionist, at worst. Be that as it may, efficient utilization of one of the precious resources, time, should be part of the campaign against Covid-19 and the recovery process afterwards. As we know, this virus, like most other pernicious viruses, is the fastest ever flying monster. It can also be killed by time: our staying at home is to slow down its speed and gradually deprive it the opportunity to ride on all of us. Therefore, time is everything in any battle; and individual time at home should be considered as one of the powerful weapons in the fight against the disease, against poverty, and all against other social problems.

The second challenge related to staying at home is psycho-emotional problem. When people that are used to working and staying out for most of the day close themselves in, they will undoubtedly feel isolated from the world. Work outside the home is characterised by myriads of non-work related to social interactions, intimate relationships (friendship, collegiality, etc.) through dyadic, group or mass communications. Because of this, in addition to earning income, people find meaning in their work and they feel attached to one another to perform their duties as important members of society. Even some of the workers who may have personal or family problems at home could find comfort at places of work and forget the sources of their distress. In this regard, staying at home may reduce their social proximity and curtail their frequent interactions. This isolation may, to a certain extent, lead to a sense of exclusion and the resulting psycho-emotional strains, especially when the duration of stay at home is extended for an indefinite period of time.

It is, therefore, imperative to understand the extent of the psycho-emotional problems to design coping strategies at all levels: individual, family, corporations, communities and national. Here again, the role of the media will be critical. However, psychiatrists, social and industrial psychologists and social workers should take the matter very seriously and respond to this unforeseen but equally devastating challenge carried on the other wing of Covid-19.

The third and most important problem due to the stay at

home policy being followed by almost all governments is the actual or potential loss of income. Millions of people around the globe, particularly in least developed countries, earn their daily bread from casual or informal employment. This group of hand-to-mouth means of subsistence is the greatest victim of sudden closures of workplaces including streets where the majority of the world's poor earns their living. Ultimately, closure will definitely consign millions of individuals and families to starvation and vicious cycle of poverty. The rich or well-to-do may survive by stocking up goods especially food and other amenities. The poorest of the poor who live on their daily toil will not afford to provide bread to themselves and to their families. Hunger, starvation and malnutrition will be the major consequences of staying at home without the means to address the sudden income loss of people. The wealthiest countries are trying to rescue businesses, provide social security or keep workers on payrolls for a given period of time. However, poor nations cannot provide even adequate health services and the means of protection from the virus: water, sanitizers, and protective medical equipment even for their health workers who will bear the brunt of the Covid-19 disaster. As things stand, governments everywhere have resorted to closure to prevent the spread of the virus, but they have not and cannot respond to the economic needs of the majority of the population which will suffer from this measure. This is very worrisome for developing countries, most importantly for Africa. Both the virus and the loss of income and livelihoods will kill millions of people until it is brought under control. Without sounding too cataclysmic, poorer nations will take decades to recover even after the spread of the pandemic is halted, if at all, unless the developed countries, including China, invest heavily to arrest the spread of the virus, reduce its destruction, and revive economic and social infrastructures as rapidly as possible. However, developing countries should take greater responsibility and build internal capacities to save lives and revive economies. For this reason, it is imperative to redouble efforts to bring about sustainable development. When individuals and families lose income *en masse* and suffer from both the disease and economic hardships, it will take a long time for the nation to recover. Therefore, urgent efforts are needed to minimize the damage caused by the policy of stay at home on individual and household incomes. In other words, it is imperative to devise mechanisms for alternative employment opportunities and income generating schemes. In addition to keeping employees at work even when firms are closed, governments should take into account the plights of people who earn their living from the daily labor in the informal sectors.

In this respect, it is essential to consider strategies that can turn the challenge posed by Covid-19 into opportunities. For example, what can women, the youth, out of school children or the elderly do to produce goods

and services at home? What should governments and non-governmental organizations do to support these people to engage in productive and income generating activities in the domestic arena? What modes of delivery of goods and services produced at home can be used? What measures can be put in place to prevent the spread of the virus if and when goods and services produced at home are distributed to consumers through formal (supermarkets) and informal (direct home delivery) marketing channels? These and other questions are important to consider in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic as they require quick policy and decision-making capacities of governments.

### **Isolationism: Implications for international and interstate interactions**

International cooperation and interstate collaboration were among the most common emergency response mechanisms in the past. Most importantly, immediate relief and life-saving assistances used to come from the developed world, notably from North America and European countries, to countries in need. What was largely missing, and was much advocated for, was south-south cooperation. China was a selective partner and often latecomer when it comes to material relief assistance in the past. It is very rare to find intra-Africa cooperation and mutual support, extremely dismal though African leaders talk of solidarity when they meet in their biannual assemblies.

Now that developed countries are in a cut-throat confrontation with the Covid-19 pandemic and themselves facing the severest shortages to deal with its devastating consequences, they are struggling to provide much needed assistance to developing countries. Quite interestingly, almost all traditional donors are seeking help from other countries. China, Russia and Turkey are sending equipment, medical supplies and health workers to fill gaps in many countries. European countries, particularly those in the east are expressing strong appreciations to these countries, notably to China, for such support. In a sense, the west is losing its image as an omnipresent provider of relief and emergency assistance to developing countries and communities. This has caused a remarkable decline in international cooperation on the wake of the novel corona virus pandemic. Moreover, since almost all countries are closing their borders, air spaces and sea ports, flows of goods and services are virtually on stand-still. This not only affects the trade-based interactions between and among nations, but also undermines the economic capacity of poor countries which rely on importation of commodities including food. As a result, millions of people across borders have become jobless and unable to feed their families. Diplomatic interactions between and among nations have significantly reduced given the

fact that embassies and consulates are closed in countries where total closure has been instituted. This has negatively affected the movement of people, including diplomats. International conferences and travels are put on hold for an indefinite period of time. The damage inflicted by Covid-19 upon families, societies, economies remains incalculable. Above all, its impact on international relations and interstate collaboration is hugely unfathomable as well. However, this does not suggest, in any way, that lack of cooperation results in hostile or negative relations. Rather, it is to indicate that closed doors and closed borders are slowing down the interaction between and among nations. How long will this isolation remain in place depends on the speed with which countries manage to stop the spread of the virus. Even after states officially declare total victory, like China, it will take time for people from other countries to believe in such declarations and resume travels or other interactions. In effect, economic recovery, large-scale cross-border mobility and international movements will be slow and take time to reach the pre-Covid-19 level.

While the Covid-19 phenomenon has brought a decline in inter-state and international cooperation along the traditional lines, where Western countries used to lead international solidarity, it has also led to the emergence of new international players. As mentioned elsewhere, China and Russia are taking the lead and are being followed by Turkey and Cuba; whereas Europeans and North Americans are either looking inward or are seeking help from these countries, particularly from China. Since the latter claimed to have won the battle against the pandemic, it is using her speedy recovery as an opportunity to scale-up the production of preventive, treatment and care technologies. China is also engaged in building her image as a great global player to fill the void left by US America. This will not only boost her international standing but also her economy shattered by the outbreak of the coronavirus. Though it has to cope with her own internal Covid-19 crisis, Russia, too, is appearing a significant global player, if not a competitor to China. Russia is forging some type of relationship with heavily affected countries notably Italy, Spain and other countries by sending medical supplies, personal protective equipment, ventilators and doctors. Lately, Russia herself has become one of the hardest hit countries.

Based on the foregoing observations, it is important to point out that isolationist policy being pursued by most countries of the world in response to the Covid-19 pandemic are putting an indelible mark on international and interstate relations both now and in the foreseeable future. First and foremost, it exposes the superficiality of concepts like solidarity, international or regional cooperation, unity of humankind, universal values, etc., which were at the heart of international cooperation in the past. In the second place, the pandemic made it abundantly clear that at the end of the day what matters

is national self-interest of individual countries; and that the gibberish talk of international brotherhood is merely for domestic or external political consumptions. Third and most importantly, it accentuates the competition over scarce resources, in particular health facilities, as is amply evidenced in the United States of America where the Governor of New York lamented on the ongoing inter-state scramble for ventilators and PPEs. Fourthly, the Covid-19 pandemic also exposes the powerlessness and incapability of international institutions such as the UN, EU, ASEAN, AU and others to foster international cooperation at this very trying time. In this sense, the pandemic lays bare the much talked about 'international solidarity among the community of nations'. In fact, some of them, like the EU, are singing into the tune of isolationism by closing EU external borders, putting an unhealthy distinction between European and non-European human beings. And this signals the death of solidarity now and may remain irredeemably lost in the years to come. At least people the world over will be forced to believe that when bad times come, they are unto themselves. This may sound an unkind and pessimistic conclusion given the myriads of ways solidarity can be realized, including financial assistance, targeted lending or donation of medical supplies, food aid, debt cancellation, etc. But whatever forms of solidarity exist, closing doors and borders, at a scale unseen in the entire hitherto history of the world, will only be mechanical or superficial. The psycho-emotional attachment of people as global citizens seems to have gone forever. "I stand to be corrected at best or blamed at worst for this generalization and a prophecy of doom and gloom in international and inter-state relations". Yet, this is the reality we are living in and it will have huge actual and potential implications for the future, which is the subject of the next section.

### **Covid-19 and the future of globalization**

Though the term globalization has been a buzz word during the last three or so decades, the practice and history of globalization is as old as humanity itself. However, the globalization being talked about here is the one that began to shape the world in the last five hundred years in general and the last four or so decades, which coincided with the emergence of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), the profuse use of air transport and the accompanied increased flow of goods, services and people. The rapid pace of globalization has brought nations and societies together at an unprecedented level as a result of the compression of time and space, a theme very well-articulated by the renowned British Sociologist Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 1999).. This acceleration of contacts among nations and societies is associated with both positive and negative social phenomena including distribution of global wealth

as well as social problems such as diseases, notably HIV/AIDS, and now the Covid-19 pandemic. While HIV/AIDS has been a source of social and global solidarity, coronavirus is reversing this solidarity and negatively impacting the process of globalization. In fact, the reverse trend of globalization begun a few years ago, mainly since the coming to power of Donald Trump. To be exact, globalization has been under constant attack since 2016/2017 as a result of Trump's isolationist policy in his vainglorious pursuit of the policy of 'Make America Great Again'. Most importantly his trade war with China and other countries as well as US's withdrawal from a number of international agreements (for example, the Paris Agreement, the US-Iran Deal) and institutions (for example, UNESCO), have entailed significant blows on globalization as a world order. In effect, the retreat of the US, the principal promoter and beneficiary of globalization, has cast considerable doubts on the future of globalization and international cooperation. At the same time, the process has diminished the image of US America, contrary to the isolationist or *hidden hegemonic* agenda of Donald Trump (Desai, 2019). This shall be a subject of another paper in the near future. Here, highlight a few of the unintended consequences of isolationism both before and following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. These include: (a) loss of trust on US America as a leading world power which used to galvanize support to communities and countries affected by natural or manmade crises; (b) the emergence of China as a major globalizing force, both in economic and political terms, with its systematic and aggressive soft-power diplomacy; (Nye, 1999) and (c) increasing leaning of developing countries, especially Africa, towards the east, notably towards China, India, Japan, Turkey and the Middle East, with a series of high-level bi/multilateral conferences between each of these emerging eastern powers and Africa as well as establishing cooperation mechanisms and platforms. Three of these mechanisms are worth mentioning (a) the Belt and Road initiative of China, (b) BRICS and (c) the Tokyo International Development for Africa (TICAD) with the aim of strengthening cooperation and providing development assistance to developing and African countries. Though, these may not replace the huge amount of lending and aid from Europe, America and the Bretton Woods Institutions, they provide alternative financial and technical assistance when getting from the west is either too conditional or unable to address the needs of developing countries. In the long-run, this new arrangements by individual or group of countries could compete with Euro-American powers to attract interest which would gradually lead to a politico-economic leaning of developing countries to the East. Already, the Chinese aggressive presence in Africa has created a sense of anxiety and a source of fierce resentment for the west. Because of this, the US and some of the major European countries have reestablished bases in Africa and this is

seen by some African scholars, including myself, as a sign of impending re-colonization of the continent (Tsegaye, 2016). The Covid-19 lockdown and the resulting isolationist approach is emboldening China to assert its control over Africa, an issue worth understanding further.

In general, the future of globalization following the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic is uncertain at best and heading to a downward spiral at worst. The impact of this declining globalization will be debilitating for both developed and developing countries. The latter will bear the brunt of regressive globalization in terms of shrinking economic and social development opportunities since the recent gains of developing nations were tied directly or indirectly to the rapid advances of globalization.

## Conclusion

The actual and potential consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lives of individuals, families, communities and nations have been discussed. It highlighted the desirability of the stay at home policies adopted by an increasing number of countries around the world to curb the spread of the virus and avert impending human tragedy. At the same time, it also outlined the negative impacts of stay at home measures on citizens, and closed borders on outsiders. Some of the negative effects include sudden loss of livelihoods, declining solidarity between and among nations; and the regressive trend of globalization. Despite the short-term advantages of staying indoors and closing borders, these policies could likely result in economic difficulties and dwindling trust on practices of international and interstate cooperation, globalization and global social cohesion, in the long-run.

At this stage, our knowledge on the unintended consequences of both the pandemic and closures to deal with Covid-19 is yet to grow. Therefore, it is recommended that comprehensive and continuous assessment of these impacts on short, medium and long-term basis be conducted. In this regard, the role of universities and research institutions in conducting timely studies of Covid-19 on the future of globalization will be critical. Empirical evidence generated through research should enable countries and international organizations, such as the UN, to make informed decisions on how to forge new, sustainable, credible and fair global alliance as well as effective response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Limitations

Since the analysis presented here is based on observations of existing and emerging global situations, the paper does not claim to have empirical or quantitative strength. It is my firm belief that given the dynamic nature

of the problems related to Covid-19, quantitative data, which are changing by the day, are less important at this moment in time. Moreover, the paper does not use direct quotations to support arguments since no source has been cited directly though reference is made to a couple of authors in the discussions. Accordingly, the list of references at the end of the paper is very short.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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