

# Beyond-Health Pandemic Management: How can we better manage the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and those still to come?

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Successful global programs must be built around integration and the strengthening of cross-sectoral and transdisciplinary collaboration and cooperation among global and societal components. In the ongoing global COVID-19 response, the health sector has been at the forefront. While this traditional health-centric principle of pandemic management is proven to be one of the most well-based and sound in terms of COVID-19 being recognized as primarily a health issue, in reality pandemic responses are confounded with complexities, resulting in more failures than successes (with only a few established and emerging exemptions). The failures have often been associated with the emergence of devastating non-health impacts. Thus, in the overall process, whole-of-society to whole-of-world, must deal with the complexities of pandemics. Detailed scientific argument is not necessary to point out that economic, political and cultural differences are strong drivers of global pandemic management pandemonium, e.g., the massive proliferation of incongruent guidelines from all countries and societal entities. And given that bad governance in many countries is surfacing, bad governance is being reciprocated by bad community participation/cooperation. The complexities are too numerous to mention all here but are at the heart of why the global management of COVID-19 has not been optimal. Clearly, the determinants of cascading pandemic risks are multifaceted and increasingly complex.

Good governance, involving the highest inter-ministerial central body for Beyond-Health Pandemic Coordination, backed up by legislation and a clear mandate, budget appropriation, resources mobilization, and model programs that lead to policy development, provide optimism to implementing comprehensive responses that are interoperable vertically and horizontally, at national and sub-national levels. These are important institutional drivers and enablers for sustainable pandemic coordination.

Comprehensive pandemic responses should consider combining human, financial and material resources with other interdisciplinary crisis management responses to benefit from synergy and maximization of shared resources among otherwise fragmented entities. Sustained investment mechanism and integrative efforts must be enabled, for instance, by the designation of a specifically mandated body, e.g., a Beyond-Health Pandemic Authority (BHPA) directly under the Office of the President or Prime Minister. Such body could be assigned a czar (secretary or minister level) and a dedicated budget for its secretariat and resources. It should be solely focused on, in this urgent time, COVID-19 risk and impact management, and collaborate as necessary with the health, economics, trade, transport, food, education, environment, Industry and other sectors on clearly defined parameters and terms, with its authority maintained at all levels, i.e., national to local. The structure and mechanism for this could be legislated. Such legislation, together with the creation of the BHPA, will remain relevant to the continuous preparedness for future pandemic threats. It is important to recognize that the main justification for these radical recommendations is: *any country with a prevailing pandemic management handicap in this modern and highly connected world is considered a hindrance to global progress.*

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Submitted: June 02, 2020  
Published: June 04, 2020

All stakeholders are specifically drawn to the enhancement of global pandemic governance. This is to ensure a sustainable approach to comprehensive capacity strengthening and broader risk reduction in the context of global resilience and security. Targeted initiatives must promote broad resilience objectives. These must be cognizant that absolute efficiency of systems, especially in relation to wide-spread pandemic threats, is contingent on the interdependencies of sectoral and systems approaches, and the capacity to enable strategic systems synergies. An efficient system requires that all actors understand their roles and are enabled to effectively respond when major threats strike, so that normal operations, economic activities and livelihood are protected and sustained.

### **Towards National and Regional Resiliency**

We desire to attain global resilience as we battle COVID-19. Global resilience means- We are doing things together; building upon each other's gains, i.e. synergizing and bringing about Oneness in the current global approaches, as quick as possible and where no country or response entity is left behind. This integrative approach is expected to deliver the best evidence-based guidelines that cause the least debate among governments and societies.

The entire region, through ASEAN, should aim for this pandemic management oneness. Within ASEAN, an appropriate senior-level inter-pillar body that could oversee the strategic coordination of ASEAN's multi-sectoral pandemic response to mitigate shocks to human security is lacking. While there is an ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM), the focal points are the national disaster response agencies that mostly deal with traditional natural disaster issues including humanitarian relief. The ASEAN Working Group on Pandemic Preparedness and Response (AWGPPR) was a technical level body representing the Health and Disaster Management agencies, but reported only to the ASEAN Senior Officials on Health Development (SOMHD) for endorsement of its outputs.

The establishment of an **ASEAN Cross-cutting Pandemic Coordination (ACPC) Facility within the ASEAN Secretariat should be seriously considered by leaders.** This Facility will enable Cross-Pillar multi-sectoral coordination of member states' responses to COVID-19. It will develop regional sector-specific guidance on operational management during COVID-19 and beyond. The central focus of this ACPC will be the coordination and harmonization of guidance within and across sectors to avoid inconsistencies, and promote interoperability.