

NAME: IDOROENYEN UDOH

COURSE CODE: IRD 202

MATRIC NO: 19/sms09/084

Identify the roles of specific international organisations in responding to COVID–19 pandemic globally

### **Introduction**

The Coronavirus, an infectious respiratory disease that began affecting a small population in the China town Wuhan, has now grown to a widespread pandemic covering a vast geographical area. A global pandemic that has affected over 100 countries. International organisations since the rise of the pandemic have been prominent in the fight against the virus by meeting the different needs of member-states and individuals, to be of immense help to the general public, the best way possible. International organisations are organisations that draw their membership from at least three states and have their influence on several states. These IOs are governed by international law and they carry out a number of functions depending on the issue they seek to solve. International organisations can be Governmental, non–Governmental or hybrid. Every country is likely to be affected one way or the other. Even if a country is not experiencing the spread of the disease within its borders, it can still be economically affected as neighbouring countries battling the epidemic will suspend economic activity. The epidemic is negatively affecting different states including developing states in aspects of their economy, citizens' standard of living, health. States, especially those underdeveloped are advised in this period, to closely work together to combat the pandemic. This can be accomplished through IOs. Thus international organisations serve as a platform where states, individuals or businesses can achieve interest-based goals, that would have been difficult to achieve if restricted by boundaries. In this paper, roles of specific international organisations in the response to COVID –19 pandemic globally, in aspects such as health, economy, labour; will be identified.

### **Response to COVID –19 pandemic by International Organisations in aspects of HEALTH**

The main objective of the World Health Organisation (WHO) is to assist governments, upon request in strengthening health services and to provide appropriate technical assistance

and, in emergencies, necessary aid, for States in need. The United Nations (UN) foremost objective at its start was the promotion of peace and stability around the globe. Subsequently, it adopted other functions still in accordance to its main objective, which is stability. One of these functions, as further seen in the list of its sustainable development goals (SDGs), is to promote good health and well-being. Thus, the creation of the special agency, the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The organisation WHO first reported the infectious disease early January of 2020 and since then has made measures to contain the spread, but with little success, as more cases were being reported since then. However, its efforts cannot go unnoticed. The organisation has provided both human resources (such as health care workers) and adequate tools (such as laboratory kits and equipment, supplies for personal protection for health care workers) to most member states chronically hit by the epidemic. It has also been responsible for training health care workers in managing cases, in surveillance and laboratory diagnostics of the disease. Some of these training centres have been erected by the WHO. Furthermore, according to the WHO regional director for Africa Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Africa has partnered up with other UN agencies, the African Union (AU) and the Africa Centre of Disease Control and Prevention (African CDC) have also helped African countries set up rapid response teams and in the mobilisation of experts among countries to exchange expertise. Furthermore, WHO and Unicef announced 3rd April 2020 of their agreement to work together on COVID –19 response. Therefore, it can be asserted the World Health Organisation is doing a commendable job and has been relatively effective in carrying out its role.

However, WHO faces a potential problem that might limit the way it responds in the pandemic. The United States government in early April announced the possibility of the state to place a hold on its contribution to WHO. It is important to note that the US is responsible for 14.67% of the organisation's total funding. With the pandemic, WHO is in dire need of all the funds it can get and this raises questions about the probability of other major donors such as the UK, France and Germany to place a hold on their contributions too. If this happens, then international organisations like WHO, that relies on input from its members, are likely to respond less to its function at this time of the pandemic.

Non-governmental international organisations like the Medicine Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders), a charity organisation comprising of health workers that provide

medical assistance to people affected by conflict, epidemics or people who have been excluded from receiving health care, has also been affected by the lack of essential needs, in their case, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). Without PPE, these health care workers can fall sick, hence, reducing the number of workers in hospitals, ready to help patients.

### **Response to COVID –19 by International Organisations in aspects of ECONOMY**

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Bretton wood institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, ever since the rise of Coronavirus outbreak, have been providing financial support to member countries. The WTO responsible for the enforcement of rules for international trade has responded to the COVID –19 pandemic by making sure necessary markets such as the food market, remains open. Also, they seek to promote a more favourable business environment among States, to prevent as much negative impact on the economy, as much as possible.

As for the World Bank, it has successfully redeployed \$1.7 billion from existing projects to tackle the pandemic. This will allow them loan funds to Low Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) like Afghanistan, Congo, India and others to provide their citizens with adequate health care systems. The World Bank also seeks to help private businesses cope with the pandemic, as that will save jobs and limit economic damage posed. However, conditions for borrowing from such financial institutions have been known to be a pitfall to LEDCs. For instance, in normal cases, a country according to the loan agreement has to lax its border restrictions to allow freer trade. This, in turn, harms infant industries of that country, as it is unable to compete with outside industries and the influx of their goods. There is no stipulation whether these institutions will loan out funds with more favourable conditions. Secondly, most developing countries like Nigeria are still in debt, more of these loans will only leave them with incurred debt, coupled with the fact that it is not guaranteed if these loans will actually be fed into the economies considering the low moral standard of governments of underdeveloped countries. Thus, conditions and terms of loans need to be reviewed before these financial institutions are regarded as commendable in its global response to the COVID –19 pandemic.

Regional financial organisations, however, for example, the financial Wing of the African Union (AU) have already established measures to cope with economic damage

caused by the pandemic. The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) will allow exporting countries like Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire (that might experience low demand from their major customers in the west) to trade around Africa, in turn, this will help boost the African economy. The European Union (EU's) European Central Bank responded to the COVID-19 pandemic around Europe by supporting liquidity and financing conditions for households and businesses.

### **Response to COVID –19 pandemic globally by international organisations in aspects of Labour and Standard of living**

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has voiced its concerns on the surge of unemployment levels during the Coronavirus pandemic period. According to the Economist unemployment levels in the UK will rise to 21% of its entire workforce and for the US 32% of its workforce. According to a study by the African Union (AU), about 20 million jobs are at risk as the continent's economy is set to shrink due to the epidemic. With no jobs, a lot of people will lack income. This will affect the standard of living across the globe. Due to this fact, Charity organisations and relief bodies have been working hard to provide relief, for instance, the United Nations on its website announced that it was carrying out measures to prevent the outbreak of the Coronavirus in war-prone regions where humanitarian needs are already high.

### **International Organisations Relevance and challenges since the widespread COVID–19**

From above, it is seen how much relevant international organisations are today, in the fight against Coronavirus spread. Different IOs like the United Nations have not ceased to help countries suffering from the epidemic, with essential resources such as PPE and experts. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has been instrumental in advancing knowledge as well as scientific research of the virus and for a cure. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is also committed to working with communities and States across the globe. International companies (Non-governmental) have also contributed the best way they can, for the fight against COVID–19. Apple Inc and Google, both international tech companies, have announced a joint effort to enable the use of Bluetooth technology for contact tracing. This is because COVID –19 can be transmitted through close proximity with

affected persons, this technology will be able to help track persons that might have come into contact with affected persons.

There is now more need for States to work together in order to combat the pandemic. Expertise redistribution is necessary, States with poor a medical system and facilities need to seek help from other States. There is also a need for better economic cooperation from now on to reduce economic damage. Thus States have increasingly become more interdependent on other States since the rise of the Coronavirus pandemic, and International Organisations can serve as suitable platforms for States to work together.

International organisations will also help to uphold international law. During this period, States are prone to act irrationally, for instance, prey on weaker States—taken from a realist perspective. Early April, Barbados accused the United States of stealing ventilators that were paid for by the Barbadian government and ready to be shipped to the Island. This was after the United States seized these 48 ventilators, that were already cleared for exportation. Therefore, IOs have a major role to play in upholding internationally agreed mode of action from States. However, such accusations against the US have been denied. But, it is still safe to assert that IOs such as the UN need to be watchful.

Most International Organisations have faced challenges in carrying out their roles in response to the COVID –19 pandemic. One of the most major challenges, as seen in the notes above, is the shortage of funding and manpower. Organisations also seem to be overwhelmed by the current situation. If States adopt a practice of 'every State for itself', there is little international organisations can do, in carrying out its role in response to COVID –19, and that includes Non-governmental Organisations too.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, this paper has been able to identify the roles of specific international organisations in responding to COVID–19 pandemic globally. IOs can be categorised into Governmental and Non-governmental and its roles are specified by the problem it is created to solve. Different IOs like the UN have been credible in carrying out their role, however, they still face challenges posed by the same pandemic they seek to combat.

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