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**IRD 310 Assignment**

**Question: How is Asia as a region responding to the Covid-19 pandemic? Contrast this with the response in Africa.**

COVID-19 is truly global problem, touching every corner of the world. From the direct health impact to economic, social, and political consequences, the pandemic has the potential to reshape countries across the globe ,even those yet to report any confirmed cases. But while the problems are similar, the impacts on and responses from each country are unique

The Asia Pacific region is standing together to cooperate regionally to address the transnational threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.COVID-19 and the response by national governments around the world has prompted many to question the future of globalization and cross border cooperation. The fear and panic which accompany deadly pandemics such as COVID-19 has led many countries, such as those in the Pacific, to implement national lockdowns, suspend international travel and close borders. The disruption to global supply chains may well also accelerate existing trends towards onshoring and reshoring of productive capacity.

The pre-existing global growth slow down, United States-People’s Republic of China trade war and the impacts of the fourth industrial revolution made onshoring and reshoring increasingly attractive. The impact of the pandemic on the People’s Republic of China, which represents 18% of global parts and components trade, and the loss of confidence in ‘just in time’ logistics, could amplify this. A potential global economic recession will further depress cross-border trade and investment. This has led some thinkers to declare the “end of globalization as we know it”.

Yet what we need now is not to step back from cross-border cooperation but to redouble such cooperation. It should be deployed to more effectively protect human health from the current pandemic while promoting a recovery of human welfare from the effects of the crisis. COVID-19 reminds us that we are highly interconnected, not just in terms of goods, capital and information but also human interaction, and that disease does not respect national boundaries.

It is therefore crucial to cooperate to ensure coordinated responses to effectively mitigate pandemic crises. These could include coordinated travel restrictions.  While these may be necessary in the short run, in the longer run this will result in significant economic and financial costs.  Consequently, it will be vital over time for countries to cooperate to factor in lessons learned while promoting recovery from the economic effects of this pandemic.

Fortunately, Asia and the Pacific is showing strong signs of understanding the importance of continued regional cooperation. The financial contagion of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis led many countries towards deeper regional cooperation and the same appears to be true for this crisis, albeit involving contagion of a very different nature.

On 13 March, ASEAN senior health officials met online to reaffirm their commitment to regional collective action, share information on the results of disease surveillance and social interventions, and discuss regional access to equipment and testing facilities. The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has also taken action. On 15 March, SAARC leaders discussed the establishment of an emergency fund to fight COVID-19, a common research platform, and sharing of knowledge and equipment.

The Asian Development Bank has regional cooperation as part of its DNA and is well positioned to help sustain these efforts. It supports regional cooperation platforms such as the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC), Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) programs. These platforms have a history of effective mobilization to support regional public goods. The GMS, for example, implemented a Regional Communicable Disease Control Project which helped contain outbreaks of disease, reduced fatalities and strengthen regional networks.

Moreover, ADB has mobilized $6.5 billion for developing member countries’ initial response to COVID-19. This includes support to the private sector, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises directly impacted by the crisis, and $40 million of technical assistance and quick disbursing.

The efforts made my the Asian regional cooperation includes:

 • Equipment, research and testing facilities: Building regional equipment pools which can be deployed where they are needed most; and adopting strategies and action plans for regional research and testing. As part of its COVID-19 regional response in the Pacific, ADB is supporting pooled procurement of personal protective and health equipment through the UN system for two Pacific developing member countries.

 • Regulations and policies: Helping countries meet regional and international standards on disease surveillance and reporting and enabling cross-border information sharing on emergence of infectious diseases; updating and harmonizing national public health legislation to support safe cross-border travel and tourism; and developing policies to support social protection of mobile, vulnerable groups.

 • Coordination mechanisms and systems: Using regional cooperation platforms and mechanisms to deepen and extend the use of information technology for trade facilitation to build regional traveler databases and information systems that operate in real-time, to support contact tracing and predict community spread. In the Pacific, ADB is using a regional technical assistance to support digital health information systems which improve disease surveillance. The intention is to strengthen country systems and support regional information exchange.

 • Resources and funding: Establishing regional resources; and strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of regional quick-disbursing disaster funds and financing instruments.

Some Asian countries like Singapore and Hong Kong closed their borders to visitors from 23 March onwards. In Singapore, the Ministry of Health announced that short term visitors will be barred from entering or transiting through the country. On the same day, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam, also declared that Hong Kong’s border would be closed to non-residents.

On the contrary, South Korea has not imposed border control the same extent as Singapore and Hong Kong. So far, the government has enforced stricter border checks on visitors from China, Italy, Iran, and other virus-hit regions and countries. All that came from the government was an announcement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to instruct the public to refrain from traveling abroad for a month. On 9 Apr 2020, South Korea rolled out a new measure that starting on 13 April, short-term visas for all foreign nationals will be invalidated. Visa waiver programs for 90 countries will be stopped as well.

Apart from measures to check imported cases, new policies have also been introduced to contain outbreaks in local clusters.

In South Korea and Singapore, all sports (except open-air stadiums), entertainment, and religious facilities are currently closed. Other venues, such as restaurants, malls, and museums would be required to comply with strict social distancing measures to keep customers at a safe distance. In Singapore, no dining is allowed at restaurants, until at least 4 May 2020.

While across African nations, range of responses are already in place ,many drawing from the painful lessons learned from recent Ebola outbreaks.

In Uganda, the Government is supporting businesses by rescheduling social security contributions.  Namibian authorities are offering emergency income grants to workers who have lost jobs.

In Cabo Verde, new cash transfers and food assistance are available.  Egypt is among those countries that have reduced or postponed the collection of taxes.

At the regional level, the African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are working to establish a special anti-COVID-19 response fund and appoint special envoys to mobilize international economic support.

There is robust support, from training to testing .Staff in peacekeeping and political missions are working to build awareness, including through mass community sensitization campaigns, trainings for civil servants and radio programs

In South Africa, the UN Country Team is helping to build a new learning platform for children whose schools are closed.  In Nigeria, the team has contributed $2 million to procure essential medical supplies, including 50 ventilators, 30,000 test kits and personal protective equipment.

Among a range of ongoing efforts, the UN Economic Commission for Africa is working with Governments in support of a debt relief package.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has dramatically expanded early detection capacity across the continent, raising the number of countries able to test for COVID-19, from two at the beginning of the outbreak, to 47 today.

Reference:

Asian Development Blog by Arjun Goswami ;Asia and the Pacific can overcome COVID-19 by working together

UN News;Health

Policy Forum ;Asian responses to COVID-19