

## COVID-19: GLOBAL IMPACT INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT AND EXPERT DISCUSSION OUTCOMES REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Abstract

The Global Virtual Summit & Expert Discussion was organised on “COVID-19: Global Impact” 15–19 June’ 2020 on the lapse of 100 days period since the first case of COVID-19 was discovered in the world. Several prominent agencies jointly organised the Summit from different regions that are engaged in social-economic-political research. A large number of experts addressed the Summit, policy-makers and researchers from various sectors of economy, politics, diplomacy, science, social institutions, civil society, education and healthcare discussing New Norm and ways forward.

**Key words:** COVID-19, strategy, global, economy, politics, policy, diplomacy.

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### 1. Introduction

The world is passing through a crisis of unprecedented magnitude at Global level in the form of COVID-19 pandemic which has transformed the way we think, behave, work and live. The

dictionary meaning of the term ‘Crisis’ is given as ‘a time of intense difficulty’. Crisis, as a medical term, is defined as “a turning point.” In Greek, the crisis is “a decision.” Putting these together, we have

the definition of a crisis: “A time of intense difficulty requiring a decision that will be a turning point.”

It is said that every crisis has an inherent potential for honest introspection and an opportunity for transformation through the lessons learnt. As a consequence, The Global Virtual Summit & Expert Discussion was organised on “COVID-19: Global Impact” 15–19 June’ 2020 on the lapse of 100 days period since the first case of COVID-19 was discovered in the world. Several prominent agencies jointly organised the Summit from different regions that are engaged in social-economic-political research; namely BRICS International Forum (BRICS-IF), Federal Association for Economic Development and Foreign Trade (BWA), International Business Acceleration Center (IBAC), ADMIS Consultancy, Center for Social and Cultural Initiatives, Association for Free Research and International Cooperation (AFRIC).

The Summit was organised with the following main objectives and outcomes in mind:

- To share the ground level situation & experiences of the pandemic in different regions
- To identify the socio-economic and political impact of COVID-19
- To discuss lessons learnt during the first 100 days of the pandemic
- To share strategies adopted and their respective effectiveness in Crisis Management
- To chalk out areas of cooperation between countries and non-Governmental organisations
- To bring out recommendations for future actions

A large number of experts addressed the Summit, policy-makers and researchers from various sectors of economy, politics, diplomacy, science, social institutions, civil society, education and healthcare.

The Summit was divided into five specific sessions:

1. Economic Impact, Path to Recovery and Evolving Perspective

2. COVID-19 Regulatory Response and Compliance Impact

3. The Political Implications of COVID-19: Changing the International Relationship Landscape

4. Change Management, Business Adaptability and Emotional Resilience

5. Recommendations

2. Economic Impact & Political Implications; Changing International Relations Landscape

The Summit kicked off by setting the scenario covering what the world and its economies were experiencing and suffering due to the global pandemic. The expert panel suggested and discussed the present status and what is to come — the aftermath — as well as how the Global economies can plot a path to recovery and a robust *New Norm*. Sectors under review included: energy, education, health, tourism, trade.

The session began with a report on Global energy scenario describing the impact due to geo-political and ethical aspects of the pandemic, wherein the trade-off between clean energy and the resulting costs has to be carefully worked out. Experts also highlighted the impact on national sovereignty due to deep economic recession and unfair Global financial system. It was stressed that countries could cement their sovereignty by developing economic resilience and humble solidarity among nations. The stellar role played by nurses, midwives and healthcare workers in managing the pandemic was highlighted and needed for their recognition and safety was stressed.

Specific discussions were held on COVID-19 situation and its impact on economies of countries like Brazil, India and South Africa. There have been negative consequences of the steps like lockdowns and sealing of international borders taken by various countries to safeguard their population from COVID-19 virus. It resulted into closure of a large number of businesses, shops and industries, rendering millions of workers jobless. The worst affected sectors were hospitality & tour-

ism, aviation, construction, automobile, manufacturing, real estate, transportation and small shops. The flight of jobless migrant workers back to their homelands also caused a severe economic crisis. The spirit of cooperation and collaboration between countries and trade groups also got weakened with the emphasis being shifted to protectionism and isolation. The pandemic has also resulted in changing the geo-political equations and international relationships.

**One interesting discussion was on the role of science diplomacy and digitalisation of society in coping with the new digital reality.** It was emphasised that developing countries must speed up the digitalisation process to catch up with the fast changes taking place in developed countries to strengthen their economies. Each country needs to protect its citizens in the current pandemic and against future outbreaks. This has caused a mix of specific policy and universal actions, some of which have the potential to strain relations with pre-COVID-19 trade partners, desired trade partners, and geographical neighbours. Balancing a nation's needs and security with international relations will require careful management.

COVID-19 pandemic has changed the geo-political equations to a large extent. Inability to handle the crisis efficiently has diminished the power of several Global leaders. There would be a lesser dependency on the Superpowers, and regional cooperation would be further stressed. Besides, the developing countries would opt for becoming more self-reliant to avoid disruption of supply chains. The impact of poor governance, widespread corruption and lack of transparent decision making also were highlighted by experts citing examples that resulted in worsening of Pandemic situation in several parts of the world. Experts also mentioned about the prevailing condition of authoritarianism and exclusionary policies being practised in spite of vast inequality in societies.

### 3. Regulatory Response

The panel of experts spoke about the response of the governments and relevant regulatory organisations in tracking, controlling, and managing the outbreak of COVID-19. The discussions covered topics like what official actions and policies have been implemented, what lessons have been learned, and what can be improved for moving forward in the battle against the deadly infection.

The session had exciting discussions on the constructive role civil society can play in drafting the Post-COVID-19 reality. The COVID-19 pandemic has given a 'wake-up' call to the humans, not to take nature for granted. It was highlighted that the virus has affected without any discrimination between rich & developing countries, or between genders, religion or region. This should also be taken as a lesson by the whole humanity that we must stand united against all such emergencies like epidemics or climate change or terrorism that affect each and every country.

The impact of the pandemic on social psychology and systems was discussed in detail. There is widespread Fear Psychosis, with the destruction of social capital and bonding between people due to prolonged lockdowns and strategy of Social Distancing that has actually resulted in Emotional Distancing and weakened the strong social fabric. Experts stressed the preservation of social cohesion while making regulatory decisions. The loss of livelihoods has caused severe depression in a young population with no social support system in place. There was a strong need for evolving a Universal Social Protection System.

**There was an interesting presentation on using 'Science for Diplomacy' and 'Diplomacy for Science' to help discover new ways to counter the menace of such epidemics.** It laid more emphasis on the concepts of interdependence and Global empathy to avoid polarisation in all aspects. There has to be an open space for debates and new ideas.

#### 4. Change Management and Adaptability

Ability to adjust to change and change resilience were key topics highlighted by experts from the fields of business and management consultancy. The ability for the prompt response to evolving situational environment was reflected to be a critical factor in business and large organisations positive response to COVID-19 impact.

Experts informed that one hundred days of pandemic highlighted a tremendous gap in business and Governmental bodies' ability to deal with significant change, such as COVID-19 promptly. Experts further analysed that this gap occurs due to several interconnected aspects: a-lack of change management and resilience to change skills, b- statics and hierarchical decision-making model within organisations and Governmental institutions and c- interconnected dependency between societal structure levels.

The classification and grouping of these critical aspects and recommendations were made by analysing and reflecting on societal structure levels: individual, managerial, small and medium businesses, large Global organisations, in-country Governments and bigger geo-political blocks. Qualitative research study and experts reflection prompted an apparent regression of the organisation's resilience to change based on an increase of the complexity within the organisational structure, size and hierarchical decision-making model. The larger the organisation and the less agile decision-making model is, the lower its ability to promptly respond to significant change.

Analysing the individual level of adaptability, experts highlight a very high response rate to adapt witnessed during one hundred days of the pandemic. The significant change, due to COVID-19 sanctions, quarantine and travel band, were incorporated into everyday life was quite prompt and immediate. The "significant change" is qualified to be any change that

is impacting all or almost all aspect of the organisational or individual operating model. And even though the change was tremendous, people managed to adapt to it very quickly by adjusting their behaviours, habits and routines such as the ways they work, socialise, shop, engage with family, doctors or their employees. Digitalisation and technology played a significant role in the success of such adaptability. However, an equal amount of behavioural changes was discussed in less digitally literate countries.

The first few weeks of Global Pandemic brought extreme uncertainty and based on the research in the field of social psychology uncertainty, and lack of clear instructions from the ruling body is precisely the primary variable leading individuals towards heightened levels of stress. Therefore, group behaviour patterns of togetherness and collective tribal response are expected following behaviours were trusted in governing body to rule is lost. Communities all over the world are coming together to help each other and those in need, creating an intrinsic ruling body and taking over functions that were once delegated to governing structures. Experts are witnessing an increase in social support and volunteering activities not only from individual and community level but from large corporate organisations going above and beyond social corporate responsibilities strategy. This behaviour can be explained by the psychological theory of common good and moral growth not only within an individual level, but social and corporate were one of the positive examples of COVID-19 lessons learn of social accountability discussed by experts.

Climbing up the societal structure levels analysing small and medium business experts acknowledge the fact that additional complexity in the operational model ( family of individuals vs small business with several suppliers, personnel and legal dependencies) reduces the ability react to change promptly. COVID-19 to this category was tremendous; many companies

had to take extra financial support, let go of their employees or terminate the business entirely. The discussion with those businesses that were able to survive and even increase their profits during the one hundred days of pandemic showed the critical element of resilience to change: market awareness and agile operating model that allows quick adaptability to any market deviations.

During the recommendation discussion expert opinion in terms of the large and Global organisations, next societal structure level, confirmed the initial analysis that the more complex operating structure is the less resilience the organisation is or can be. One hundred days of Global Pandemic proved to be a perfect stress test to review organisations' target operating model, human capital management methodologies, and business strategy validity. And even though some organisations were able to adjust successfully, the change was stressful, complicated, financially damaging and with little or none contingency.

The societal structure of in-country Governments had very low resilience to change in terms of regulatory and policy adjustments as well as a consistent and aligned crisis management approach. Further analysing the internal changes required, specific sectors have been highlighted, including sectors of Monterey economics and finance, energy and electricity, as well as health and education. The requirement for the Foundation of Financial Conduct and administrative changes to battle fraud, money-laundering, and extortion, within finance sectors, were the areas that faced or led to the highest risks during the pandemic. Therefore, experts concurred that there is a significant need for large scale change and crisis management experience or consultancy not only during crisis management but to adjust governance model to more agile and flexible to geo-political landscape and other dependencies—additionally a need for the better social perception of management methodologies within governing

bodies towards common knowledge forming. Transparency and consistent communication on the progress of political commitments will lead to increased public involvement and interest. Therefore, it may potentially lead to positive social bias if the public's expectations are met.

And even though one country achieves excellent success in adjusting to a change as significant as COVID-19, its decision-making power still depends (to a varying extent) on the bigger geo-political blocks. In-country sovereignty or autonomous decision-making power over an individual country should always be a top priority. In-country independence must be preserved under international law, assuring that all Government or non-governmental entities must adhere to the supreme power of individual countries' authority to make self-governing decisions.

### **5. Emotional Resilience and Social Impact**

This section dealt with the social impact, social values, public perceptions, and philosophical viewpoints regarding COVID-19 pandemic. The experts pointed out towards the inherent opportunity existing in a crisis for introspection and redesigning of paradigms that govern our attitude, working and living.

The positive impact of families coming together for more extended periods developed a greater understanding of priorities and the lesson that the right direction was much more important than higher speed. Linking it to the broader picture of Global developments in the past three decades, experts felt the closing of borders and restrictions on movements were against the spirit of globalisation. Moreover, the tendency to blame the more impoverished migrants and minorities for all socio-economic ills was counter-productive and would hurt the social fabric.

**An interesting suggestion was to make BRICS as a Mission for all nations, with a renewed full form as "Building**



**Responsive, Inclusive & Creative Societies”**. The worst effect of COVID-19 and lockdowns has been on shrinking of mindsets of ordinary people towards each other due to fear psychosis. This has resulted in compassion getting replaced by suspicion; and has turned each family into an isolated entity. In fact, it would have been preferable to call for ‘Physical Distancing’ rather than ‘Social Distancing’. Experts also highlighted the need to put People Security at par with National Security; thereby allocating more resources and efforts to ensure the well-being of the population.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Following are the major conclusions drawn and recommendations made by the learned experts during this Global Summit:

### On Economy:

- There has been a massive impact on the global economy, which is likely to shrink much due to the pandemic and resultant lockdowns. There has been a significant loss of livelihoods during the first 100 days and which is expected to result in widescale unemployment, especially in developing and underdeveloped countries. This would require redesigning of employment policies & programmes by the respective Governments.
- With more emphasis on contact-free interactions and remote working, the existing workforce needs reskilling and upskilling to meet new requirements as online education, financial transactions and marketing would become the New Normal.
- For migrant workers, more job opportunities need to be created near their places of origin to avoid migration to urban centres.
- Companies need to develop local supply chains to avoid disruptions in production.

- Industries need to be reopened fast with adequate safety measures in place.
- Suitable financial stimulus packages must be designed by the Governments, keeping in view the respective local conditions and constraints to boost the demand and revive the economy.
- Medium, Small & Cottage industries have suffered a lot due to lockdowns. Special incentives need to be implemented for their revival and creation of employment in these industries.

### On Society:

- The pandemic has created a fear psychosis, disrupting social bonding. While physical distancing can be continued for safety, people should be encouraged to help each other emotionally.
- Loss of livelihoods and diminished hope for further jobs have caused a widespread state of depression and low self-esteem among the youth and working class. This must be addressed adequately.
- The minorities and migrants must be treated equitably and given due respect.
- There is a strong need to build responsive, inclusive and creative societies to cope with new & unforeseen challenges.

### On Governance:

- While generally appreciating the measures taken by the Governments to deal with COVID-19 crisis, the Summit felt the need for more proactive governance, keeping local requirements in mind.
- Resorting to endless lockdowns is not the solution for pandemic and may result in more severe problems in the long-run.
- There is a need to root out discrimination and inequality in various sections of society.
- Poor governance, ineffective leadership, civil disturbances and widespread corruption are some of the significant roadblocks to meeting such challenges

like a pandemic, mainly observed with reference to African countries.

- Governments and agencies must ensure proper energy security for every household.

#### **On Business:**

- Businesses need to redesign their products and processes to enhance digitalisation and online working, giving employees the flexibility to operate from their homes wherever feasible.
- With most of the new employees belonging to Millennials, there is need for enforcing changes in working styles. A clever mix of leadership & managerial abilities of the elders with the technological skills of younger employees will help in smooth change management.
- The businesses must be equipped and trained for disaster and crisis management.

#### **On Education:**

- Due to COVID-19 Pandemic, the educational institutions from schools to universities all over the world have been closed. This has necessitated switch over to online teaching and evaluation system. Institutions must train their faculty members for taking online classes and preparing digital modules.
- However, online teaching cannot replace the benefits associated with campus life for the holistic development of students. Hence, as the situation improves, a hybrid model of education system would have to be adopted combining the classroom and online education methods.

#### **On Healthcare:**

- The selfless role has been played by millions of nurses, midwives and healthcare support staff during this pandemic. Governments should invest

more in developing nursing and support services, as a shortfall of over six million is estimated in this sector.

- 'Health for All' schemes should include not only physical but also psychological health of the people with proper investments and implementation.
- Availability of sufficient quantity of PPEs, medical equipment and medicines should be ensured at all hospitals.
- Safety and health of medical practitioners, nurses and support staff must be ensured against the pandemic with a proper supply of PPEs.
- It is ironical that healthcare sector receives less than 2% of GDP of investment every year at most of the economies. This needs to be suitably revised upward.
- More infrastructures need to be created in medical education to produce more doctors and paramedical staff.

#### **On Culture:**

- Pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have distorted the social bonding to a large extent. A culture of faith and harmony needs to be strengthened among people.
- Mutual respect for diverse religions and religious practices has to be developed, taking help from spiritual epics.
- Values like honesty, tolerance, compassion and empathy must be taught right from the schooling stage to develop better human beings.

The Global Summit concluded with the strong message of 'Universal Togetherness' among nations, regions and communities. It advocated for policies with a human face while handling critical situations like COVID-19.

With an optimistic attitude of **"Together, we shall overcome"**, the Summit came to an end with a promise to keep in close touch and to meet again.