



Doha Forum Report Op-Ed Draft

Tackling Problems Without Passports in an Age of Epidemic Uncertainty

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Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a clear test to international cooperation, revealing leadership gaps in some of the world's largest multilateral organizations. At frequent intervals during the crisis, the international response has been fragmented and under-resourced. Nevertheless, in the U.S. and in many other developed countries, the crisis is beginning to recede. But many of the problems that plagued the international community as it tried to contain the virus are the very same ones that are gumming up the global vaccination campaign. Once again, international cooperation is king—and once again, leaders are falling short in their global collective action efforts, often failing to learn from the lessons the past year has taught us.

One major manifestation of what ails the international governance system is the rise of "vaccine nationalism"—a modern-day manifestation of the "I've got mine" mentality, whereby rich countries with ready supplies of vaccines and the resources to buy more hold off on making those resources available to poorer countries, including by sharing the requisite intellectual property rights for manufacturing vaccines through licensing. The problem with this approach is that we are reminded frequently that the coronavirus is a problem without a passport—and lack of vaccination anywhere is a problem for people everywhere.

To unpack some of the initial lessons from the COVID-19 crisis and examine the crisis' health and broader socioeconomic challenges and opportunities, the Stimson Center, a nonpartisan policy research center, in collaboration with The Doha Forum, a global platform for dialogue, released the [*Doha Forum Report 2020: Coping with New and Old Crises: Global and Regional Cooperation in an Age of Epidemic Uncertainty*](#), which examines and aims to foster enhanced multilateral cooperation toward the coronavirus pandemic and other global challenges. Specifically, the report emphasizes that any move toward global recovery must invest in: 1) public health, human rights, and social protection; 2) economies that are robust, efficient, fair, and opportunity-building, both for entrepreneurs and for youth; 3) economic recovery that doubles as effective climate action; and 4) greater and more inclusive digital connectivity worldwide.

One clear takeaway is that the coronavirus fueled interwoven economic and social crises, which laid bare and widened existing socioeconomic gaps. Moreover, the pandemic could worsen inequality and discrimination, and heighten social exclusion and unemployment,



|| governments and multilateral organizations fail to prioritize aiding the most vulnerable and addressing pervasive inequality within and between countries.

At the same time, the virus is also creating opportunities to innovate—not only in the way we respond in the short term to the crisis, but by shaping a prosperous and sustainable post-COVID-19 future. To that end, we have called for expanded investment partnerships in overall capacities for primary health care and sanitation through enhanced public-private partnerships. The COVAX initiative through the World Health Organization, alongside several governments and nongovernmental partners, represents one such positive example, leveraging international public-private partnerships to achieve common goals. Countries can invest in and now access the portfolio of COVID-19 vaccines developed by private companies, while working to ensure equitable vaccine access regardless of a country's level of development. Currently, vaccines are starting to be rolled out worldwide within an equitable allocation framework developed by the WHO, and some countries have taken to heart recent lessons to responsibly engage in this new kind of “vaccine diplomacy.” The Biden administration’s recent creation of a dedicated State Department coordinator for global COVID response and health security, for instance, is a step in the right direction.

Increasing worldwide investment in public health needs to be coupled with stronger supply chains and an enhanced global trading system that incorporates innovative technologies, fosters e-commerce, and ensures the inclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises. However, in order to be made both durable and sustainable, economic recovery plans must also be environmentally sensitive, with a focus on decarbonization and a broader knowledge base for climate action. Governments prioritizing not just recovery, but a “green” recovery, are integral to a post-COVID-19 world that ensures healthier citizens and greater progress toward the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Between 2000 and 2015, multistakeholder partnerships—a powerful and relatively recent occurrence in global governance—increased fourfold. This type of collaboration is what is needed more than ever to tackle the interconnected challenges facing the globe. Innovative types of public-private partnerships, such as the International Telecommunication Union, Facebook, and Microsoft’s [*Accelerating Digital Connectivity in the Wake of COVID-19*](#) initiative, presented at the Stimson Center’s September 2020 UN75 Global Governance Forum, are helping to ensure digital effectiveness and readiness, limit interruptions of essential services, and help steady the digitalization of most public services across the public health, economic, and environmental planes.

Responding to the present crisis as an opportunity for innovation will not only help in the short term, but will shape a prosperous and sustainable post-COVID-19 future. The effectiveness of our decisions today may determine the fate, stability, and health of countries and their citizens for generations to come.

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