

Introduction

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Going into a third year of the COVID-19 pandemic and with fourth and fifth waves affecting international development in myriad ways, reflection and analysis on what has been happening is continually needed. The pandemic developed at differing paces across diverse contexts around the world and elicited quite disparate societal reactions to what has been the biggest global health emergency in a century. Even a cursory glance at the data on the spread of the virus reveals that governments in all contexts were ill-prepared for the emergence of such a virulent pathogen, its spread and severity. Registering a death toll of over 6 million people and more than 500 million cases by the summer of 2022, the history of this pandemic has been determined primarily by the patterns of contagion, emerging variants, often erratic political decision-making and by inequalities in healthcare and pharmaceutical provision.

For the Global South, the pandemic has served to further expose the gross imbalances in health systems, the recoiling protectionism of the Global North and, ultimately, a residual inflexibility in power relations that has unnecessarily left many highly vulnerable regions open to the worst effects of the virus. There is a need to critically reflect on the reactions and responses to the pandemic so that policymakers, in particular, can be more fully informed about the social, economic, political, security and healthcare implications of this globalized event and plan for the future. There is also a need to survey the socioeconomic effects of this pandemic on low-income

countries, and to seek corrections to the prevailing patterns of power and governance that have exacerbated its impacts.

Governmental responses have been critical in dealing with the fall-out and indeed in adapting to the different variants. In some cases, state reactions have brought into question the very principle of protecting public well-being. This, arguably, has been one of the most revealing aspects of this period – affecting international development, policy and practice alike. There remain many countries, most notably but not exclusively in the Global South, without the requisite resources, professionals, political acumen or international weight to cope with an event of this scale. The disjoint between those with and those without has further exposed the complex differences in global health and social care systems in particular. Furthermore, the varying, often confused responses by many governments – caught under the influence of global pharmaceutical industries – to this global threat has been a notable feature of the pandemic. Public sector debilitation has added widespread challenges to already strained human development processes, complicating other ongoing global crises, including climate change, conflict (particularly in the Sahel, Ukraine and Yemen) and the global trafficking of people. Understanding the layering of this health crisis on top of others is important if the pandemic's impacts are to be mitigated and sustainable development achieved. When international development is taken into consideration, there is a need to repoint energies and resources towards those countries that are being most heavily affected through a lack of capacity or wealth. To bring this to the key issue, mitigation can only be half the answer – the future proofing that comes with development partnership is also critical for a genuine process of pandemic recovery.

The purpose of this book is to consider the pandemic's impacts across developmental scenarios, taking into account the timeline of the pandemic. In the first phase of the pandemic, the public health response was prioritized as the immediate challenge. In subsequent phases, economic effects and interactions with

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public health awareness, resource distribution and the shoring up of healthcare systems assumed greater prominence. What has been notable is that the respective phases required informed and targeted interventions resulting in changes to governance, public and social policy, locally and globally, and shifts in the culture of public responsibility. What became evident was the evolving form of political action, from border closures and restrictions on the freedom of movement (all with human rights implications) to national lockdowns. These difficulties were matched with economic stasis, job losses and shortages of healthcare equipment. In the medium term, in some cases, new institutional and social innovations – such as the heroic role of women’s organizations and healthcare volunteers – emerged to cope with the contingencies of the public health crisis, dealing repeatedly with the mutation of the virus, different waves and geographic spread. In other cases, the virus was used to populist or political ends, or as a geopolitical weapon, with negative public health effects. In the longer term, two years after the initial outbreak, the situation became more precarious across much of the Global South, with health protectionism marking the roll out of strategic planning in the Global North. Indeed, policymakers in many places opted for national or regional responses – or disengagement – from global institutions and guidelines, such as those of the World Health Organization (WHO). Indeed, the United States’ withdrawal from the WHO early in the pandemic gave legitimacy to other governments questioning the science. After two years, the initial WHO-driven consensus has for many states become superfluous to political motives and imperatives.

As a remit, this collection of chapters examines how the pandemic has been affecting different parts of the Global South through the outlook of international development. It looks at the formation of various government strategies at national and regional levels and assesses how effective they have been. It has brought together some of the most knowledgeable specialists in the field of development studies and furthers the conversation

among those working in academia and nongovernmental organizations on addressing crisis situations pertinent to the pandemic. This dialogue on the subject aims to inform public debate, provide concise – mostly *in-situ* – insight and anticipates next steps. It attempts to suggest answers through critical engagement and is intended to be of use to development practitioners, policymakers, academics and those working to address the myriad issues the pandemic has created. It reflects on key problems that have arisen globally going into a third year of a pandemic and explores the implications for development planning. The emerging and reinforced disparities and disparate responses have caused the pandemic to affect regions and societies in radically different ways. This has also brought forward lessons. Indeed, what has emerged has been a cascade of crises: of solidarity, a global health provision meltdown and resulting socioeconomic inequalities – accentuating uneven development – that it will arguably take a generation from which to recover. Contributors focus on the development implications of this period, medical impacts, gender (in) equality, human rights derogations, regional disparities and the effects on marginal groups, vaccine monopolies and economic scarring, among other issues. Particular attention is paid to the increased risks faced by vulnerable populations, the diverging impact of policy interventions and often erratic governmental adaptation to the exigencies of public protection.

This book aims to contribute to social science and humanities research by investigating key issues and emerging concerns pertinent to the Global South in particular. It is a collaboration between the network and academic community grouped around the Development Studies Association Ireland, its partners around the world and with the support of Irish Aid. It is transdisciplinary and draws on perspectives from health, economics, geography, development practice, political science and other academic specialisms on themes relevant to international development, public and social policy. The scale of the pandemic and the socioeconomic shock across the

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Global South needs to be looked at through a different lens to give those acting in the field a better critical knowledge base to help mitigate the effects of a protracted pandemic, particularly in highly vulnerable regions. The book's central objective is to generate discourse from a Development Studies' perspective on ways in which the impact of COVID-19 can be mitigated through development and where recovery can be envisaged in an integrated, equitable and sustainable manner.

