

Emerging Issues Of Human Development In A Covid-19 World

Barnali Deka

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received: April 16, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: September 17, 2021</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords : Human development, COVID-19, Healthcare, Education</p> <p>DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.5514159</p>	<p><i>Human development issues are very much crucial for humanity in order to bring progress and prosperity in the context of the whole developmental process. The concept of human development is very much associated with the access to proper healthcare, education and increasing the capability to earn for a better livelihood. The process of ensuring these opportunities to the people all over the world is jolted by the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. India with many other parts of the world is also striving to combat the challenge posed by the COVID-19 crisis. But the number of active and death cases related to Covid infection is increasing day by day. The health, education and economic sector are devastated by the countrywide lockdown and its negative impacts are seen in socio-economic life of the people. Following the World Health Organization's instructions to mitigate the crisis India is adopting covid response strategies including socio-economic security measures for the people. In this paper an attempt is made to highlight on major issues of human development unleashed by the adverse effects of COVID-19 pandemic in India.</i></p>

Introduction

The effects of COVID-19 pandemic reveal the dangerous consequences for humankind. The negative impacts of COVID-19 crisis adversely jeopardize the issues of human development putting all at the risk of a miserable condition of life. The global emphasis on human development in terms of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 by the world community is now at stake with the 2nd and 3rd wave of the pandemic in many parts of the world. India being a faster growing economy is striving to bring stability in the income level; an increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to assure the basic minimum facilities including health security to its citizens during this crisis. It is true that the destruction in economy weakens the COVID response apparatus of the government to deal with the challenges in socio-economic areas of vulnerability that emerge due to COVID-19 crisis. The issues of human development are being affected to a great extent raising the question of survival for all. In this paper an attempt is made to highlight on the major issues of human development unleashed by the adverse effects of COVID-19 pandemic in India.

What is Human Development?

When we speak in terms of development, it encompasses a wide range of issues and indicates many meanings. In general, the government comes to power contesting the election on the basis of issues like, economic growth, welfare, equality, justice and empowerment. These are the major issues of human development that brings change and progress in a particular society. Prior to 1990s the term development was often associated with countries economic growth. But since 1990s the concept of development is enlarging its scope including many issues of human life. The economists like Mahbub-ul-Haq and Amartya Sen were the two persons who contributed to the emergence of this concept. The concept human development is something more than economic growth; the capability of improving one's well-being through enlarging their freedom and opportunities. Thus, the concept of human development became one of the major areas of concern all over the world encompassing a vast area of issues from improving a standard of living, improving the education, conditions of health and providing basic facilities of life to the human. Although economic growth remains as one of the important issues, yet enabling the conditions of health, education and income along with freedom also become the component of the whole process of development.

According to UNDP Human Development Report, Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the three essential ones for people are to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. If these essential choices are not available, many of other opportunities remain inaccessible (UNDP, 1990)¹. To correlate economic development and human development the Human Development Report, 1996 says, "Human development is the end- economic growth a means".² The Human Development Report 1990 emphasis on two sides of human development- the formation of human capabilities such as improved health, knowledge and skills and the use of people make of their acquired

capabilities- for leisure productive purposes or being active in cultural, social and political affairs. If the scales of human development do not finely balance the two sides, considerable human frustration may result (UNDP HDR, 1990)³. The main aim of the concept is enhancement of people's choices- to create an environment with ample opportunities so that they can develop their full potential. Once these opportunities are got, the path for people to lead a productive and creative life will be opened up. Simply speaking human development is development of people. It is a process of inclusive development that deals with the issues of income, socio-political aspects, health, education and all other aspects related to decent standard of human life.

For true realization of this holistic approach of human development Sustainable Development Goals are formulated under the United Nations and the responsibility to achieve these goals are entrusted to its member countries with the promise to "leave no one behind" by 2030. In order to transform the world for a better and sustainable future these goals address the issues that put challenges to human life including poverty, hunger, health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, clean energy, economic growth, peace and justice etc. Emphasis is also given on developing global partnership to achieve these goals.

It is unfortunate that the dream for achieving a sustainable world is shaded by the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in the last part of the 2019. The crisis in many parts of the world since early part of 2020 shows the risk of leaving many people behind from getting the chance of living a decent standard of life. The threat to health, income, education, equality and such other areas put by COVID-19 crisis shattered the life of many people all over the world. Its shocking impacts are such that in view of United Nations, "It is becoming an acute social crisis in many parts of the world, affecting people's lives in multiple ways, including a surge in violence against women and disruptions in jobs and livelihoods."⁴ World Health Organization data reveals that till June, 2021 more than 17.3 crore COVID-19 cases are detected all over the world causing more than 37.3 lakhs death cases (<https://covid19who.int>). According to UNDP perspectives on human development COVID-19 is "a systematic crisis in human development."⁵ It is a systematic crisis because the shock arising out of a health crisis effected by the corona virus leads to the economic and social crisis. The devastations are seen not only in the economic activities, health and education, but also in gender equality, security, migration, poverty, hunger, nutrition and many other areas of concern for human development.

Issues concerning India:

The unprecedented calamities brought by COVID-19 pandemic since 2019 are witnessing by the humankind all over the world. India is also not an exception to them. Its severity is not only identified by the death of millions of people but also its long-term effects on our health, economy and social life to be realized in future. The shocking experience for India lies with many challenges ranging from lack of health facilities, poor educational infrastructure especially in rural areas, lockdown creating problems like loss of job, labour migration, food security, impact of shutdown in economic activities and also gender based violence and so on. The measures taken to protect the health have adverse effects on children, workers, women, old persons, people engaged in informal sector, small entrepreneurs including poor and underprivileged people. The adoption of measures like lockdown and social distancing has closed the path of earning for many people with lower income.

Health:

As already stated, the three main components of human development are health, education and access to resources. Health is the most important aspect for a human life as only a healthy person can live a long life enabling himself or herself to accommodate with the environment taking the opportunities of getting education, employment or other choices. Modern developments in medical sciences and use of technologies have made human life easier and are able to protect from many diseases ensuring a good health for people. But the scenario in health sector is changed by the outbreak of the COVID-19.

Table-1: Top 5 countries with covid cases till June 11, 2021

Country	Total cases	Total death	Active cases	Population
USA	34,275,783	614,007	5,383,382	332,828,477
India	29,274,823	363,097	1,121,653	1,392,753,410
Brazil	17,215,159	482,135	1,062,270	213,980,268
France	5,729,967	110,270	148,616	65,409,502
Turkey	5,313,098	48,524	77,846	85,191,618

Source: www.worldometers.info/corona (accessed online on 11/06/21)

The dangerous corona virus infects millions of people all over the world as it can easily transmit from one person to another if the infectious person coughs, sneezes or exhales. According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), "Covid-19 is the underlying cause of death caused by acute respiratory syndrome or

pneumonia.”⁶Older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardio vascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.⁷ If a person is infected by COVID-19 virus with these conditions the risk of developing respiratory infections is increased and may develop more complications. Till 13th June, 2021 India is recording 84,332 daily new cases and 4002 deaths in 24 hours as per the Times of India report⁸.

Keeping in view the Sustainable Development Goals India has adopted multifaceted strategies to build the health infrastructure to assure health security to the people. But the out breaking of the pandemic has given a jolt to this process of achieving the SDGs. The health care sector of India is not well equipped to tackle the unprecedented rise in covid cases. India is a vast country with world’s 17 percent of total population. Against this huge number of population India still lacks the healthcare infrastructure, shortage of doctors, hospital beds, medical equipment like ICU bed, ventilators, oxygen etc. With 8.5 hospital bed per 10,000 population and 8 physicians per 10,000 population (Fitch)⁹ a country with world’s second highest population is still struggling to mitigate the crisis. Limited access to health facilities in remote areas is a serious matter of concern.

Moreover, the negative impacts of the pandemic can be identified in different ways concerning the status of people. Loss of jobs or income in many families results in the loss of access to food and nutrition to fulfill the requirement of a good health for the poor people. If a person is infected by the corona virus in such conditions will fail to develop the immune system in his/her body. Maintaining nutritional status is very important for a person to fight back the virus. In many cases the component of maintaining a healthy and longer life is also been compromising by developing a sedentary lifestyle, increase in sleeping and eating habits, developing obesity etc. during lockdown. Digital education, smart working, limited outdoor activities and in gym physical activities on one hand and reduce consumption on fresh foods, especially fruits, vegetables, fish etc. due to restriction in grocery shop led to changing eating habits and lifestyle. Research studies says that all these are causing threat to our health.¹⁰

Education:

The spread of COVID-19 has resulted in closing down the educational institutions including schools, colleges and universities in order to maintain social distancing. The closure of these institutions has compelled the education sector to shift the traditional classroom learning model of teaching to a digital learning model. According to UNICEF, “the COVID-19 pandemic has battered education system around the world affecting close to 90 percent of the world’s student population. In India over 1.5 million schools close down due to the pandemic, affecting 286 million children from pre-primary to secondary levels”.¹¹ It is because the educational infrastructure mostly in rural areas are not well equipped to deal with the current crisis. Due to the fear of loss of academic years for the students the education sector has adopted the technology driven education system with blended mode of learning. Online education now becomes a “new normal”. But this new normal is creating many disturbances for both the teachers and learners in the absence of proper internet facilities putting them into an abnormal situation. According to a 2019 government survey only 24 percent households have access to the internet in India (with only 4 percent in rural India).¹² It results in the poor absence of students even after launching the online education. However, the system has taken gradually an upgraded lift under compulsion to continue the education process. Realizing the need of reviving it schools has started classes, periodic assessments, examinations through virtual platform using apps like ZOOM, WebEx, Google Meet, Skype, Teach mint, Google Classroom, Whats App, YouTube, Facebook etc. Although it is implemented many teachers and students have to face challenges to be acquainted with these new technologies as they did not have proper training to handle all these. Prior to COVID-19 outbreak, the school authority did not allow the students to bring phone or other electronic gadgets but after lockdown this equipment becomes the essential medium of learning. But these processes become fruitful only in the urban areas having proper electricity, net connectivity and access to other electronic gadgets. The schools or colleges from remote areas are still not able to cope up with this new normal without electricity, internet access and other infrastructural facilities. Millions of children from poor and underprivileged sections are depriving from getting online education due to lack of smart phones or computers. According to India Today news, “out of India’s 1.2 billion populations, only 600 million are connected to the internet, mostly via smart phones. This creates a huge barrier for students (especially in rural areas) to access online education during lockdown. As the academic year progresses on the same schedule across India, these unconnected students fall further behind their connected peers as classes proceed online. Even those with internet connections may not be able to access the 4G speed needed to view online streaming video lectures”.¹³ Another serious problem associated with the school closure is the loss of nutrition need by millions of children which was provided through Mid-Day Meal Scheme Launched by Government of India. Thus, one of the major criteria for human development i.e., access to education is been jeopardized due to COVID pandemic.

Economy:

The goal of human development is “enabling everyone to be capable and free to do things and be the person they want to be.”¹⁴ Freedom of choice for a person to fulfill his or her wants is highly determined by income. So, sustaining economic growth and a stable economic condition benefits the people to improve the levels of human development. The negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic is seen in the flow of capital, trade activities and most significantly in migration of workers. Declaration of lockdown, restrictions of economic activities and loss of jobs for many workers in India has resulted in sudden break of people’s freedom of choice to do things or to enhance their capabilities.

India is one of the most affected countries in the economic sector from the pandemic caused lockdown implemented by the government as the last resort to control the spread of the virus. Restrictions on economic activities caused the sudden closure of industrial productions; break in the supply chain, raising the unemployment rate, especially causing millions of people (mostly the wage earners) to lose their jobs and livelihood. According to the report published by Statista Research Department, in the first quarter of financial year 2021, India’s GDP was declined by 24.4 percent compared to the same quarter in the previous year. However, it grew by 0.4 percent in the third quarter of financial year 2021 compared to the same time period in the previous year.¹⁵ Impacts are visible in all construction activities, service sector including the telecom sector. The sharp rise in the unemployment rate is caused by the sudden displacement of workers due to the impact of corona virus on Indian economy.

Table-2: Changing unemployment rate due to lockdown in India.

Characteristic	Unemployment rate (%)
January, 2021	6.53
December, 2020	9.06
November, 2020	6.5
October, 2020	7.02
September, 2020	6.68
August, 2020	8.35
July, 2020	7.4
June, 2020	10.18
May, 2020	21.73
April, 2020	23.52
March, 2020	8.75
February, 2020	7.76

Source: Statista Research Department, 2021

After imposition of lockdown in March, 2020, suddenly the rate of unemployment increased to 23.52 percent in April, 2020. As phase wise lockdown was eased identifying the areas as “Red, Orange and Green zone” according to the severity and case of infection, the rate of unemployment also decreased. But the 2nd wave of the pandemic again worsens the situation before reaching to stability. The recent study conducted by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) reveals that India lost 3.4 million salaried jobs in April, 2021. Employment dropped from 82.2 million in February to 76.7 million in March and 73.3 million in April.¹⁶ The cases of loss of jobs were visible more in urban areas than rural areas. Another area of concern for Indian economy was arisen out of the migration of labour from their workplace to home after the declaration of lockdown. The first phase of lockdown was witnessed thousands of migrant workers gathered in the bus and train stations in the cities (especially in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore) to reach their homes. This led to the increasing risk of being contaminated by the virus amidst of huge public gatherings. Studies shows that, in India significant number of migrant workers are temporary or seasonal migrants and they migrates in search of their better livelihood from one state to another or one district to another. The bulk of these migrants also hail from marginalized section of the country and they mostly belong to the lower income group including both male and female.¹⁷ The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on these internal migrants were extreme. Media has reported that an enormous number of men and women were walking hundreds of kilometers back to their native land (Venkataraman; Ranjan, 2020).¹⁸ According to BBC news¹⁹ and other sources, migrant labours died of accidents in railway tracks, shramic trains, female migrants gave birth to children on their way to home. The unprecedented impacts of the pandemic compel the migrants to suffer from starvation, illness, insecurity and such other problems threatening their right to livelihood and their mental and physical health.²⁰ According to Professor Ravi Shrivastava (Director, Centre for Employment Studies, Institute of Human Development), the worst affected migrant labours are “vulnerable” because of their weak position in the job market who work in construction sites or small factories. In his view close to 60 million moved back to their “source” rural areas in the wake of pandemic induced lockdown.²¹

India's Covid Response Policy:

Indian Government following the WHO instructions- social distancing, masking, sanitizations is made compulsory for all. Lockdown is imposed since March, 2020; phase wise it has been eased and still continuing in some states where necessary. Schools and colleges are closed and restrictions in movement of people are imposed through curfew. Government is taking necessary action for testing, isolating, tracing and aware the people. India is trying to handle the crisis by testing and making available the RTPCR kits. India has conducted total 37.81 crore tests and vaccinated 25.31 crore people till June 13, 2021.²² Manufacturing of medical equipment materials has been fastened to meet the needs of rising cases. Many private companies and start-ups are also producing medical equipments like ventilators, oxygen, N95 masks, PPE kits etc. Different organizations, NGOs, social workers, women groups, voluntary organizations and local people are preparing hand sanitizers, stitching indigenous masks and are distributing these to the people.

Dealing with the challenges faced by the educational institutions, Ministry of Human Resource Development has taken necessary initiatives. The ICT initiatives²³ of MHRD is a platform through which all digital resources for online education are made accessible to the learners. For learners of higher education sector, courses and materials are offered through SWAYAM, MOOCs, e-PG Pathshala, SWAYAMPRAKHA (with 32 DTH Channels), CEC-UGC You Tube Channel, National Digital Library, Shodganga, Vidwan etc., MDRC is providing supports to learners in collaboration with University Grant Commission. For secondary education sector, Launching of Diksha portal, e-Pathshala, National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), NISHTHA App, pdf format of NCERT textbooks²⁴ are becoming very helpful for school students to receive education without breaking their studies during lockdown.

To boost up the economy Government of India announced the Atmanirbhar Bharat package in response to COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It is a special economic and comprehensive package of Rs 20 lakh Crore, equivalent to 10 percent of India's GDP to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in India. The Atmanirbhar Bharat or self-reliant India will support the state governments by increasing the borrowing limits from 3 percent to 5 percent for 2021. It also includes Rs 3 lakh crore collateral-free automatic loans for businesses including MSMEs. Besides these Rs 30,000 crore are sanctioned by NABARD during COVID-19 to RRBs and Cooperative Banks which benefit nearly 3 crore farmers.²⁵

Apart from these, the home states of the migrant workers build more number of quarantine centers with isolated beds; ensure food supply, clean water, sanitizers and more testing centers with hospital bed for the covid positive patients. Schools, colleges, community halls are being converted into isolation centers and covid care hospitals. The Government launches a scheme namely Migrant Workers Return Registration to count the number of daily labours and migrant workers who got stuck in other states as well as to provide them with 14 days of quarantine facilities.²⁶ Indian Government also declared relief packages towards corona virus affected people. The government has announced Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojna, to boost employment opportunities and livelihood for migrant workers.²⁷ Ministry of Home Affairs also urged the state governments to provide medical and psychological needs of the migrant workers along with food and shelter requirements.²⁸

Conclusion:

In this paper an attempt is made to highlight on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on three major components of human development i.e. health, education and income (economy). The above analysis shows how these three aspects of human life are jolted badly by the waves of the pandemic. In the beginning of its outbreak the whole world was shocked and people became deeply affected by fear of losing their lives. The tremendous impact of the crisis is seen in terms of psychological aspects (distress, depression, tension, anxiety, fear of death etc.) and in socio-economic aspects (loneliness, loss of jobs, migration, deprivation of education, poor health and illness, gender violence etc.). In other words, the pandemic has reduced the chance of enhancing their capabilities to live a decent standard of secured living which is an important criterion for the process of human development. The breakdown of economic activities creates insecurity in terms of food, job and health compelling the people to live in uncertainty. Here the most crucial point is that the government is trying to address these issues with strategic management in a collaborative manner. Government of India along with its state governments is adopting a systematic approach by identifying the focus areas and dealing with the problems accordingly. Responding to the crisis government is launching educational, economic and social security measures and is reforming the infrastructural facilities. This pandemic has taught the world to live a self-reliant and sustainable life and to plan for the future by adopting a cooperative model with local priorities. Only then freedom can be realized and capacity to develop one's potentialities will be increased up to the required level.

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Author Information

Dr. Barnali Deka,
Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science
Mangaldai College, Mangaldai, Assam

