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THE STATE OF THE PANDEMIC: WHERE THE VIRUS IS, WHAT IMPACT IT HAS, AND HOW THAT CAN BE TACKLED

By Dr David Nabarro

STATE OF THE PANDEMIC AND IMPACT:

The numbers of new cases are (in general) reducing in Western European countries this time: it is likely that they will start to grow again as the movement of people increases. The current experience of Beijing, China is an indicator of what can happen even when authorities and people are on high alert.

Transmission can be limited through people adopting COVID-ready behaviour (distancing, face protecting, hygiene and protecting those who are vulnerable). Outbreaks can quickly be suppressed through effective community-based public health services. Will these elements be prioritized by decision-makers in local and national government, businesses and civil society? They should be as they are critical for successful re-opening of economic and social life.

Statistics show that the numbers of people with COVID-19 – and the associated mortality – is increasing rapidly in the world's poorer regions. Even though the actual numbers of cases and deaths are likely to be far greater than the official figures, yesterday's *epidemic curve* from the World Health Organization (figure 1) shows that the numbers of cases *and deaths* are on the increase in Central and Latin America, South Asia, and the Middle East: Africa is not far behind.

Global epidemic curve by region (cases reported to WHO as of 14 June 10H)

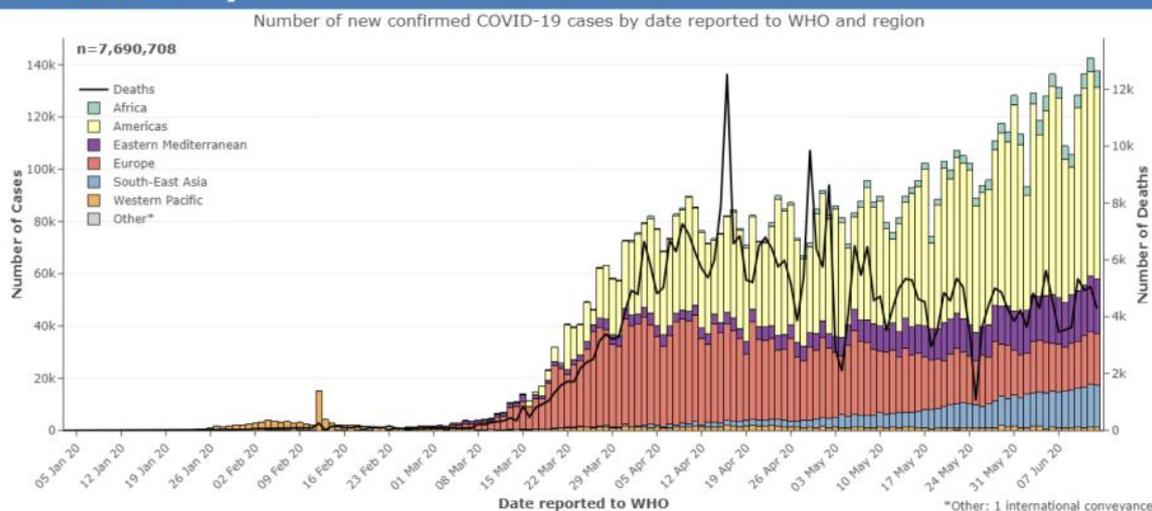


Figure 1: World Health Organization COVID-19 Global Epidemic Curve 14 June 2020

Communities and governments are responding intensively but they face massive challenges because they have limited capability within health sectors and beyond. This is a global crisis: poor people and poor nations need support now and for the foreseeable future to avert a profound mega-catastrophe.

THERE ARE THREE GLOBAL PRIORITIES NOW:

a) accompanying all the **People** of our world as they *make sense* of the shifts in personal behaviour that are needed for COVID-ready societies and work out how to implement them in ways that minimise the risks for themselves and their communities;

b) going local with a focus on the **Places** where people live, work and come together: this means ensuring access to locally specific information and coordinated actions, to interrupt transmission when it starts and suppress outbreaks quickly before they explode; and

c) ensuring that **Public Health** services to support comprehensive responses for surveillance, testing-tracing-isolating, triage and treatment, protecting those who are vulnerable, and responding rapidly and robustly to outbreaks, are in place everywhere.

There is one other principle to which we should all adhere: the need to act for equity at all times, in a unified way. This means focusing on equitable opportunities, related to people's assets, sex, ethnicity, class, nationality and more, when it comes to:

- reducing people's risks of illness and mortality,
- availability of protective equipment to those who need it the most,
- people's access to care and treatment for COVID and non-COVID conditions,
- the access to social protection for people affected by containment measures (especially women and children),
- people's protection against redundancy, and

The need for equity also applies to opportunities for small and medium enterprises and others to access protection (including debt forgiveness) when facing bankruptcy and hardship, as well as opportunities for countries to receive support when they have difficulties with balance of payments, fiscal space etc.