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Planetary Health: Potential Pathway Towards a More Resilient World Post-COVID-19



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The current COVID-19 pandemic has been wrecking the world for almost two years. Among the various theories that attempt to offer explanations of its causes, environmental degradation has emerged as a plausible answer. This view is founded on studies that suggest there is a causal relationship between ecosystems and capability to regulate diseases. It essentially posits that increasing risks of zoonotic disease outbreak and spread are contributed by degenerating nature. This framing positions environmental protection and conservation a key component in ensuring public health for generations to come.

The ongoing public health crisis is gaining planetary health concept some traction. The concept, which was formally introduced in 2015, establishes that the health and the care of the natural systems determine human health and human civilisation.

The basic proposition of this concept is not new since the need to safeguard nature to ensure sustained well-being of mankind has long been acknowledged. It is in fact enshrined in the 1972 Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which is the first global document on the environment.

What is special about planetary health concept is that the environmental focus came from the public health discipline. It signals that the care for nature is no longer an exclusive concern of environment-related domains and suggests that environmental protection is increasingly becoming a pre-condition for other sectors to perform well. It therefore calls on other sectors, including the public health itself, to accord priority on nature.

Planetary health is founded on systems thinking. It thus offers an overarching goal of environmental protection and conservation which different

sectors need to adhere to if the world were to minimise the risk of another pandemic in the future. Adopting planetary health as the guiding principle across sectors will allow measures such as respecting the Earth's biocapacity limits to be applied in sectors that deal with resource extraction. The concept will likewise help synergise priorities and resource allocation across sectors with a common aim of improving and safeguarding the health of the planet.

Planetary health concept presents a potential pathway towards a more resilient post-

COVID-19 world. Considering its commonality with green recovery that likewise emphasises on the environment, green recovery discourse could serve as an entry point for planetary health concept to get introduced and gain relevance across sectors.

The problem, however, lies in whether countries will embark on a green recovery post-COVID-19. At the time of writing, countries continue to struggle between containing the spread of the virus and reviving their economies. As such, countries may choose to stick to ex-

isting, or slightly modified, developmental pathways to wade through this pandemic time.

For a better, more resilient world post-COVID-19, more efforts need to be made to operationalise planetary health concept in different sectors and push it through green recovery plans at the global, regional, and national levels.

Suggested Readings

- De Paula, Nicole and Liz Willetts. "COVID-19 and Planetary Health: How a Pandemic Could Pave the Way for a Green Recovery." IISD, March 5, 2021. <https://www.iisd.org/articles/covid-19-and-planetary-health-how-pandemic-could-pave-way-green-recovery>.
- Khoday, Kishan., "Climate, Covid-19 and Planetary Health, SDG Integration." Accessed September 2, 2021. <https://sdgintegration.undp.org/climate-covid-19-and-planetary-health>.
- Patz, Jonathan A. and Ulisses E.C. Confalonier., "Human Health: Ecosystem Regulation of Infectious Diseases." In *The Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Current Status and Trends: Findings of the Condition and Trends Working Group*, edited by Rashid Hassan, Robert Scholes, and Neville Ash, 391-415. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005.
- Whitmee, Sarah, et al., "Safeguarding Human Health in the Anthropocene Epoch: Report of The Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on Planetary Health." *The Lancet*, Vol. 386, no. 10007 (2015): 1973-2028, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60901-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60901-1/fulltext).

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Sustainable pathways needed for water-secure Asean region

Regional cooperation is needed to tackle emerging water issues, including equitable access to safe and affordable water supply, sufficient water to ensure food security and support the region's economies, and sustained solutions that mitigate water-related hazards.

Sen David

Khmer Times

25 August 2021

More risks of environmental incidents at sea amid pandemic

The maritime environment is facing a number of risks emerging amid the COVID-19 pandemic, especially oil spills, so it is necessary to proactively make preparations to respond.

Vietnam Plus

27 August 2021

Climate change leads to more extreme weather, but early warnings save lives

The number of disasters has increased by a factor of five over the 50-year period, driven by climate change, more extreme weather and improved reporting. But thanks to improved early warnings and disaster management, the number of deaths decreased almost three-fold.

UNFCCC

1 September 2021

China 'tells US envoy John Kerry it will follow its own climate road map'

Beijing has rebuffed American calls to make more public pledges on climate change before COP26, insisting it should follow its own plan rather than adhering to a list of proposals that the US presented for China to accelerate its climate action.

Catherine Wong

South China Morning Post

3 September 2021

'Code red for humanity': What next for mankind?

Amid repeated warnings against the devastating consequences of climate change, a stronger commitment to climate adaptation measures is what is next for mankind.

Margareth Sembiring

RSIS Commentary

6 September 2021

Concern grows in developed countries on climate change, people willing to make changes: Pew survey

Across all 17 countries polled, a median of 34 per cent were willing to consider "a lot of changes" to daily life.

Nirmal Ghosh

The Straits Times

15 September 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Framing climate change: The need for a human security perspective

This NTS Insight explores how investigating the impacts of climate change through a human security lens, in addition to the current narratives, might ensure the security and stability of communities in a new climate future.

S. Nanthini and Tamara Nair

NTS Insight, Singapore: RSIS NTS Centre

2021

Planetary health and triple planetary crisis: Relevance for multilateral cooperation on biodiversity protection and conservation in Southeast Asia

Nature decline offers a compelling explanation for the outbreak and the spread of the disease. This coincides with the formulation of the term 'triple planetary crisis.' The rise of planetary health concept amidst this pandemic time could potentially offer a useful entry point to strengthen biodiversity values in sectors driving environmental pressures.

Margareth Sembiring

NTS Insight, Singapore: RSIS NTS Centre

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Fourth Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific

Member States will discuss challenges and opportunities to strengthen the regional environmental agenda for delivering the sustainable development goals and regional commitments to international agreements, among others.

Suwon City, Republic of Korea (Virtual)

5-7 October 2021

UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15) (Part 1)

CBD COP 15 will review the achievement and delivery of the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. It is also anticipated that the final decision on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework will be taken, together with decisions on related topics including capacity building and resource mobilisation.

Kunming, China (Virtual)

11-15 October 2021

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Indonesia, US intensify cooperation in energy sector: Ministry

This bilateral cooperation is an important task for the two countries, as it can facilitate exchange of ideas and increase momentum and speed along with the COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow, England, in November 2021.

Sugiharto P and Resinta S

Antara News

2 September 2021

Energy from sun viable source of green power

Singapore plans for solar capacity to quadruple to 1.5 gigawatt-peak (GWp) by 2025, before rising to 2 GWp by 2030. This would meet about 4% of Singapore's current electricity demand.

Teh Shi Ning

The Straits Times

5 September 2021

TNB to develop 300MW hydroelectric power plant in Kelantan

The project would reinforce the security of energy supply in Peninsular Malaysia, particularly to the eastern region, while ensuring TNB plays its role in balancing the energy trilemma for the nation. TNB said the strategic national hydroelectric project would be the company's mission to support the Malaysian government's ambition to increase the share of renewable energy (RE) in its installed capacity to 31% in 2025 and 40% in 2035.

Ayisy Yusof

New Straits Times

7 September 2021

Government urged to review foreign ownership rule in RE projects

Apart from allowing higher foreign ownership, it was suggested that the Philippine government could provide specific incentives for renewable energy investors—not just financial incentives—that can help reduce risks on the side of the developer.

Danessa Rivera

Philippine Star

7 September 2021

IAEA, Japan Agree on Timeline for Safety Review of Water Release at Fukushima Daiichi

Japan is expected to start discharging the treated water from the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2023. In line with the commitment of IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi to provide IAEA support before, during and after the water discharge, the first of a series of IAEA preparatory technical on-site review missions will take place later this year.

International Atomic Energy Agency

9 September 2021

Why China is developing a game-changing thorium-fuelled nuclear reactor

With molten-salt technology, it is the salt itself that becomes the fuel. The crystals are mixed with nuclear material – either uranium or thorium – heated to over 500°C to become liquid, and are then be able to transport the heat and energy produced. Theoretically, this would make the process safer. However, there are nuclear proliferation issues that some experts have pointed out.

Sebastian Seibt

France 24

12 September 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Hydrogen in ASEAN: Economic prospects, development, and applications

Energy derived from hydrogen provides an option for the ASEAN Member States. It would not only green the energy supply, but it would also enhance indigenous energy supplies, thereby improving the region's energy security.

Beni Suryadi, Adhityo Gilang Bhaskoro, Suwanto and Li Yanfei

Jakarta: ASEAN Centre for Energy

2021

Renewable energy in EU-China relations: Policy interdependence and its geopolitical implications

This report presents options to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C and bring CO2 emissions to net zero by 2050, offering high-level insights on technology choices, investment needs, policy framework and the socio-economic impacts of achieving a sustainable, resilient and inclusive energy future.

International Renewable Energy Agency

Abu Dhabi: IRENA

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

IRENA Insights: Supporting Climate Action Ahead of COP26

This webinar highlighted findings from collaboration with African and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) signatories to the Paris Agreement to improve their mitigation targets, as well as discuss how these new national climate policies collectively put us on a path to limiting dangerous levels of warming.

Recorded Webinar

8 July 2021

IRENA Youth Talk: Youth Powering Sustainable Energy Technology

This webinar showed the positive impact of technological development on the living standards of young people and how a renewables-powered energy transition can have a positive outcome on young lives by improving access to key services, such as education and health/

Recorded Webinar

14 July 2021

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Your food prices are at risk as the world runs short of workers

Manpower shortages are impacting agriculture globally, whether in food harvesting, packing, trucking/transport or warehouses. These contribute to a 33% increase in prices from September 2020 to September 2021 based on UN Food and Agriculture Organisation statistics.

Elizabeth Elkin, Mai Ngoc Chau and Agnieszka de Sousa, BBC News

2 September 2021

Sri Lanka's food emergency heightens fears of militarization

Given drying foreign exchange reserves, Sri Lanka's president declared a state of emergency in early September 2021. This allows the government to dictate retail prices for essential food items and to seize stocks from traders; a major general of the Sri Lankan army has been tasked to head this process of food supply stabilisation.

Munza Mushtaq

Nikkei Asia

6 September 2021

UN warns of 'urgent imperative' to avoid acute Afghan food insecurity

Afghanistan today is dealing with soaring prices for essential goods, with limited means of addressing it given that US\$ 7 billion worth of Afghan reserves have been frozen by the United States, and IMF has also shut off financing to the country.

United Nations

UN News

7 September 2021

How can China-ASEAN stabilize the food supply chain under the epidemic?

During the recent China-ASEAN Agricultural Cooperation Forum, multiple bilateral agricultural cooperation initiatives between ASEAN countries and China were highlighted. The Philippines' Agricultural Counsellor in China noted that country-level efforts are insufficient in addressing natural disasters, African swine fever and other animal diseases. Hence, bilateral and also regional efforts are much needed.

Breaking Latest News

11 September 2021

There is no food crisis to come out from- Minister Cabraal tells BBC

State Minister Ajith Cabraal denied the presence of a food crisis in Sri Lanka, saying there are sufficient food stocks available, except that traders are hoarding food products.

Daily News

11 September 2021

Why is there a food emergency in Sri Lanka?

Sri Lanka is facing food security concerns with rising prices of food products like lentils, onions and sugar. The sudden April 2021 ban of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides contributes to this, and some argue for a more gradual approach in shifting towards organic farming.

Shruti Menon and Ranga Sirilal

BBC News

12 September 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Maximizing sustainable agri-food supply chain opportunities to redress COVID-19 in developing countries

COVID-19's impacts on the food system offer opportunities for policy change. This report provides recommendations, including the use of sustainability standards as a tool to foster transparency and traceability along the supply chain.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
2020

Causal impacts of epidemics and pandemics on food supply chains: A systematic review

This article reviews over 173 documents to present a taxonomy of linkages between pandemics and food supply chain disruptions as well as to provide a structured method for evaluating policies that ensure functional food supply chains amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Brenda Cardoso et al.

Sustainability, Vol. 13, No. 17
2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Impacts of a hybrid health-economic crisis on food security

During this segment within the RSIS Webinar Series on "Non-Traditional Security Concerns in the New Normal", Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros, RSIS Research Fellow, shared the pathways through which COVID-19-induced hybrid health-economic crisis has impacted on food security.

Recorded Webinar

1 June 2021

Science and sustainable food systems in South-east Asia region: Challenges and ways forward

Professor Paul Teng, RSIS Adjunct Senior Fellow, shared on the importance of environment-friendliness, economic viability, social justice and governance in establishing resilient food systems in Southeast Asia.

Recorded Webinar

14 July 2021

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Covid-19: Vaccine passports to start in England this month

Vaccine passports in nightclubs and other indoor venues in England will be required at the end of September.

BBC

5 September 2021

COVID-19: 'Unacceptable' deals and delays, hampering lifesaving COVAX deliveries

COVAX's ability to protect the most vulnerable people in the world continues to be hampered by export bans, the prioritisation of bilateral deals by manufacturers and countries, ongoing challenges in scaling up production by some key producers, and delays in filing for regulatory approval.

UN News

8 September 2021

Beyond Delta, scientists are watching new COVID-19 variants

The continued spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus has spawned a Greek alphabet of variants - a naming system used by the World Health Organization (WHO) to track concerning new mutations of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

9 September 2021

Global health security COVID-19 and its impacts – Johor's pandemic challenges

The full re-opening of land borders between Johor and Singapore is critical for Johor's recovery and is in the interest of both countries, but prospects remain uncertain.

Jose Ricardo Sto. Domingo

RSIS Commentary

10 September 2021

New technology designed to genetically control disease-spreading mosquitoes

*Scientists have created a new technology for controlling mosquitoes. The precision-guided sterile insect technique alters genes linked to male fertility and female flight in *Aedes aegypti*, the species responsible for spreading diseases including dengue fever, chikungunya and Zika.*

Mario Aguilera

UC San Diego News Center

10 September 2021

With economies on the brink, South-east Asia chooses to reopen amid Covid-19 outbreaks

Even as they struggle with one of the world's worst COVID-19 outbreaks, nations across Southeast Asia are slowly realising that they can no longer afford the economy-crippling restrictions needed to squash it.

The Straits Times

13 September 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Improvements to a framework for gender and emerging infectious diseases

Sex and gender issues are important during pandemics and epidemics; however, they are routinely overlooked. In emerging infectious disease contexts, sex and gender factors affect the vulnerability, exposure risk, treatment and response that may affect the incidence, duration, severity, morbidity, mortality and disability of those who become infected.

Lynn Lieberman Lawry et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 9
2021

Thailand's national strategic plan on antimicrobial resistance: progress and challenges

This article assesses the progress and challenges in implementing Thailand's national strategic plan on antimicrobial resistance 2017–2022, discusses interim outcomes and shares lessons learnt.

Nithima Sumpradit et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 9
2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Western NSW Primary Health Network Webinar: COVID-19 in Australia, Delta variant, Long COVID and Vaccine Hesitancy

This webinar provided an overview of differences between Delta and previous COVID variants; long COVID prevalence; and disease spectrum. It provided strategies to address vaccine hesitancy in our communities.

Recorded Webinar

31 August 2021

RSIS Webinar on Malaysia's Policy Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Drivers, Players, Consequences

This webinar explored the following questions: 1) What has COVID-19 revealed about the strengths and weaknesses of Malaysian policy-making?; 2) What are the longer term implications of Malaysia's management of the pandemic for public health, the economy, and its fiscal position and priorities?; 3) How have authority and leadership been exercised, and has the pandemic changed public expectations of the government and politics?

Recorded Webinar

31 August 2021

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Biometric data and the Taliban: What are the risks?

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has led to urgent concern about the safety of data that aid groups have collected over 20 years.

Irwin Loy

The New Humanitarian

2 September 2021

The push to anticipate crises gains steam

As humanitarian needs continue to outstrip available funding for response, anticipatory action is gaining momentum in the broader humanitarian field. It has been clearly exemplified by the recent Anticipatory Action Event which had over 75 governments and 60 aid agencies and other organisations pledging tens of millions of dollars.

Heba Aly

The New Humanitarian

13 September 2021

Taliban reassure UN over safety of humanitarian workers in Afghanistan

The Taliban has given the UN written assurances on the safe passage and freedom of movement for humanitarian works. Although money has been raised to address the crisis in Afghanistan, many are still doubtful about the veracity of these promises.

Patrick Wintour

The Guardian

13 September 2021

The case for treating long-term urban IDPs as city residents

international NGOs and multilateral agencies should work with municipal authorities This would allow local authorities to build their capabilities to continue to provide essential services and assistance to these communities even after initial short-term projects funded by international agencies are over.

Lucy Earle and Christopher Ward

International Institute for Environment and Development

14 September 2021

Plan to build back better in SE Asia

Almost two years since the COVID-19 outbreak began, social and economic disruptions continue despite the attempts of some countries to return to 'normal'. For any semblance of normal to be achieved, action to build back essential health services better must happen as soon as possible.

Poonam Khetrpal

Bangkok Post

14 September 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021: Managing systemic risks from biological and other natural hazards

This report addresses the complexity of converging and cascading risks by analysing natural and biological hazards simultaneously.

UNESCAP

2021

Disaster management and the need for a reinstated social contract of shared responsibility

This article analyses governmental inquiries and actions undertaken regarding three past catastrophic disasters, and advocates for a reinstated social contract that inserts citizen rights and justice into disaster management policy making.

Mark Croweller and Petra Tschakert

International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, Vol. 63

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

RSIS World Humanitarian Day 2021 Webinar on "Responses to Crises during the Pandemic: Challenges and New Modalities"

This webinar generated discussion on the following topics: (i) Challenges faced by the humanitarian sector during COVID-19; (ii) Potential solutions and initiatives to help alleviate these challenges; and (iii) Risk perception and its effects on crisis management.

Recorded Webinar

19 August 2021

The Grand Bargain 2.0 and New Dynamics for Humanitarian Reform

This webinar generated discussion on plans and ambitions to create a new GB 2.0 momentum among humanitarians and on the highest political levels, as well as on two priority areas: 1) expanding quality donor funding, and 2) supporting leadership, delivery and capacities of local humanitarian responders and the participation of affected communities.

Recorded Webinar

7 September 2021

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Europe turns away from asylum-seekers

Although COVID-19-induced border closures have meant a reduction in the number of refugee arrivals in Greece, this state is unlikely to continue. With the recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, refugee numbers are set to rise.

Dominic Simonelli

The Interpreter

24 August 2021

Helping migrant and displaced children thrive

The risks facing migrants differ based on factors including gender and age. COVID-19 has further exacerbated these risks with women and children facing additional challenges caused by border closures and other measures such as potential exposure to riskier entry points and extortion by border gangs.

Sweta Shah, Joan Lombardi, Nada Elattar and Katie

Murphy

UNICEF

27 August 2021

The shrinking options for Afghans escaping Taliban rule

With the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan further exacerbating the situation, international aid organisations are worried about the continuation of their programmes. And with neighbouring countries' reluctance to take in more refugees, they are likely to face a period of prolonged uncertainty.

Eric Reidy

The New Humanitarian

30 August 2021

Tentative steps toward vaccine equity in Malaysia

While recent statements made by Malaysia's new health minister that everyone regardless of documentation status is eligible for COVID-19 point towards vaccine equity for undocumented migrants, these migrants are unlikely to come forward. These statements must be backed up by concrete actions.

Lina Lakhdhir

Human Rights Watch

8 September 2021

Thailand: Migrants plead for vaccines as COVID takes lives, jobs

As Thailand faces a severe outbreak of the COVID-19 Delta variant, those living on the Thai-Myanmar border are facing a range of challenges including a lack of access to coronavirus-related healthcare as well as a lack of income due to the closure of businesses.

Caleb Quinley

Al Jazeera

14 September 2021

Climate change spurs threat of war, mass migration in region

Climate change should now be considered a "threat generator" rather than simply a "threat multiplier" with Australia needing to step up its consideration of climate change as a security threat for the country. In particular, the potential regional impacts of climate change must be considered as a factor in its security planning.

Nick O'Malley

The Sydney Morning Herald

14 September 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Ebb and Flow, Volume 1 : Water, migration, and development

This report examines the link between water and migration, and its implications for economic development. It finds that while policies that focus on reducing the impacts of water shocks are important, they must also be complemented by strategies that broaden opportunities and build the long-term resilience of communities.

Esha Zaveri et. al

2021

Groundswell Part 2 : Acting on internal climate migration

The 2021 Groundswell report provides a picture of the potential scale of internal climate migration in three regions including East Asia and the Pacific, allowing for a deeper understanding of its impacts and what can be done to mitigate these impacts.

Viviane Clement et al

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Reducing Mistreatment of Migrant Domestic Workers

For migrant workers, the risk of exploitative working conditions resulting from the highly asymmetric power relationship with their employers and their inability to enforce contracts can be relatively high. This webinar looks at whether framing the initial encounter between migrants and employers can improve the relationship and working conditions in the longer run.

Webinar

29 September 2021

Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion (SIARI): Sowing Innovation in the Cracks of Crisis

This conference will bring together experts in the field to explore how social innovation for inclusion has fared during COVID-19. It will also discuss how social enterprises, community-led enterprises and the broader ecosystem can strengthen the approach to addressing humanitarian crises.

Virtual Conference

4 October 2021