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Why Social Justice is the Most Effective Means of Disaster Impact Mitigation: Lessons from the Pandemic*

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the impact of a systemic crisis depends very much on the prevailing level of inequality in the society concerned. This paper shows how the affordability of food was reduced dramatically for millions of people due to income loss in the wake of the pandemic, and the consequences this had. An analysis of the political economy of crisis then illustrates how economic inequality acts as a massive amplifier of disaster impacts on disadvantaged individuals and populations. Environmental degradation, across a broad spectrum from climate change to biodiversity loss, acts similarly as an impact amplifier in this and most other crises. Economically disadvantaged people are more immediately exposed to the impact of ecological degradation or may be forced to disregard the need for nature protection, which means the two factors are also mutually reinforcing. Inequality literally kills people, the more so in this century of worsening multidimensional crises. The paper argues that inequality on this scale is not just immoral but undermines human security, even for relatively privileged population groups, as well as threatening the stability of international relations. Addressing inequality, and especially inequitable policies in the food producing rural sector which acted as a major safety net for the poor during lockdowns, is thus the best pathway to mitigate future crises and their impact on food security.

Key words: Covid-19, inequality, disaster impact mitigation, human security, resilience, small farmers as a safety net

Introduction: Why Covid-19 Rapidly Inspired Global Concern

The Sars-CoV-2 virus was new and did not discriminate since there was no population group on the planet that had any prior immunity to it. The first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic was thus marked by a very rapid dispersion of the virus which was reliant first on global and then on more local mobility. The

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virus initially appeared in Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei Province, where arguably it remained unrecognised for too long – though it is always easier to know what to do with hindsight. The very first victims were from the unremarkable local Chinese population of the same-named city, and the first cases were not taken seriously enough. Soon after, however, the virus was carried out of China and around the world by jet-setting travellers. By mid-April 2020 the demographic group with the greatest physical exposure to viral infection risk were a privileged elite with high international mobility and their immediate social contacts (Wachtler et al. 2020). This guaranteed the Covid-19 health crisis almost instant global recognition from the World Health Organisations and many national authorities around the world. Covid momentarily appeared to be a disease of and crisis for the wealthy. Rapid and substantial declines in the value of shares and other asset classes underlined this perception.

A few months into the pandemic, however, it became evident that the stringency of public health measures such as social distancing and compulsory mask wearing, and the level of pre-existing health system capacities including intensive care units, medical staff and equipment such as ventilators, were now the key variables of infection and mortality rates respectively. Outcomes differed greatly across nations in accordance with such policy and infrastructure variables. Covid-19, however, still did not yet seem to discriminate in the way crises usually do. Some countries in the Global South outperformed some of the richest countries in fighting the virus, including the US and UK, as a consequence of policy inaction in the latter. Vietnam for example, managed to keep the number of cases very low. The warmer climate on average and the greater youthfulness of populations in developing countries also kept a lid on infection and mortality rates respectively, reflecting the fact that the virus was heat sensitive and posed a disproportionate risk to older and immune-compromised people and those suffering from chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as obesity.

The initial impression of Covid-19 as an indiscriminate threat has lingered in public perceptions, largely because mainstream western media gave insufficient attention to the growing and soon dominant proportion of so-called "undeserving" victims, in a pattern similar to what has been observed of the climate crisis (Stanley 2021). Unlike such other crises, however, this pandemic has deepened and thereby revealed an underlying crisis that is certain to outlive and out-scale the Covid-19 health crisis, namely, the global crisis of inequality.

Disadvantaged populations were soon disproportionately affected not only by the virus itself, but even more so by its indirect, systemic impacts. The most unsafe work places were those of low-paid workers, in the US meat processing industry for example. People living in crowded accommodation also were at greater risk of infection. Furthermore, the fact that economically disadvantaged populations everywhere tend to have limited access to health care services, a

poor diet or outright malnutrition, and a heightened prevalence of pre-existing medical conditions that weaken the immune response, has led to a much higher mortality rate among disadvantaged populations even in wealthy countries.

In the next stage of the pandemic, inequality in health outcomes was accentuated by inequal access to vaccines (Our World in Data 2021). Some 80% of all doses of the first batch of vaccine, developed by the German start-up company BioNTech and produced and distributed by the US pharma giant Pfizer, were quickly claimed by a few rich countries (Sachs 2021). A similar initial pattern has applied to most of the other Covid-19 vaccine releases. As of 16 November 2021, 2.6% of people in low-income countries were fully vaccinated against Covid-19, compared to 66.6% of people in high-income countries according to the UN (UN 2021). The media, to their credit, did report on this 'vaccine injustice' in a timely manner (Sridhar 2020), and the UN has attempted to make amends, albeit with only limited and much delayed success due to corporate resistance to calls for waivers of their highly profitable patents.

Another, more indirect impact of Covid-19, however, escaped recognition in the early phases of the pandemic: The impact of health and health-care related inequalities actually pale in comparison with the impact of economic inequalities during the pandemic. To highlight the tragic consequences of economic inequality in a crisis situation, indeed in almost any kind of crisis, is the main objective of this paper. This critique will be augmented with some positive policy suggestions for improving crisis resilience and especially food security.

Covid-19 as an Economic Crisis

Economic disruption due to Covid suddenly and severely reduced the food security of millions of people because it led to a rapid loss of income and increase in poverty. In addition, food availability in some places was hit by disruptions in production and supply chains. More often, however, the vital problem was reduced food affordability, caused by a sudden loss of employment or other income. In the mainstream daily news outlets such as Reuters, the New York Times or Guardian, until today, we look in vain for a league table comparing the number of deaths across countries due to Covid-19 induced food insecurity. Scientific research is largely limited to measuring the prevalence of hunger, and there is nothing comparable to the daily data dump of information on the number of virus victims across various national and local jurisdictions. That kind of news is not seen as relevant to the elites and middle classes of wealthy western nations who supply the "worthy victims" of this crisis.

Perhaps the increase in hunger victims due to the pandemic is also not considered news because hundreds of millions of people have long been food

insecure, even under the until recently prevailing conditions of a global food production surplus. Indeed, until 2014, we could derive some moral comfort from the fact that the number of human beings subject to starvation was at least shrinking gradually. From then on, however, ever more serious climate change impacts have led to a global rise in hunger by 18%, even before the Covid-19 crisis struck economies in early 2020 (FAO 2018). Under the impact of Covid-related economic lockdowns, poverty has been skyrocketing and, as we shall see, *additional hunger due to the pandemic is set to kill more people than the virus itself*. The nature and magnitude of this other, indirect systemic crisis in the wake of the Covid pandemic will now be considered.

Covid-Driven Hunger: Some Facts on Food Security in a Global Crisis

Shut-downs of economic activity constituted a minor inconvenience for some, but for others the impact on their livelihoods was utterly devastating (Duckett and Mackey 2020). Around the world, people in low paid and precarious employment and without significant household savings were the most likely to become unemployed and instantly food insecure (Purtill 2020), not to mention housing, education and health insecurity. The UN's World Food Programme estimates that the number of people experiencing crisis-level hunger rose to 270 million by the end of 2020 because of the pandemic, compared with 135 million in 2019 – an increase of 100% (WFP 2021). Oxfam estimates that by the end of 2020 between 6,000 and 12,000 people died each day from additional hunger linked to the crisis (Oxfam 2021). And this increase could persist for a decade or more in developing countries, much longer than the pandemic itself.

Another factor leading to increased hunger were food price spikes in some localities. In South Sudan, for example, Covid-19 restrictions and climatic events adversely affecting the harvest drove enormous increases in local prices after January 2020. The average retail price of wheat doubled in this country (ETR 2020). Similar patterns are seen in many of the most food insecure countries in Africa, where the pandemic crisis compounded the impact of the much slower but also much more profound climate crisis to produce a severe level of systemic stress. In November 2020 the FAO named four famine hot spots, namely Burkina Faso, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen (FAO 2020). A ISC report estimates that overall, "the number of lives threatened by acute levels of hunger is expected to double due to the crisis" (Sperling et al. 2020:7). Thus 2021 has made history as a year of famine on a scale not seen for decades. The recent crisis in the Ukraine has now added to this to create a perfect storm of food insecurity.

In developed countries too, economic inequality has translated into divergent Covid impacts. In the US, for example, by March 2020, 39% of those earning less than 40,000 USD per annum had already lost their jobs or had pay checks reduced, compared to only 13% of those who earned 100,000 USD or more (Menon 2020). In short, low paid and precarious employment conditions correlate strongly. Women and young people also were more likely to lose their job than men, due to the more often precarious nature of their employment. According to a US Census Bureau pandemic survey (cf. Menon 2020), only half of all US households with children felt "very confident" about having enough money to afford food over the next month, and a staggering 5.6 million households struggled to put enough food on the table in the past week. Families of colour were suffering disproportionately due to lower average incomes and more precarious employment, with 27% of black and 23% of Latino respondents with children reporting not having enough to eat over the past week – compared with 12% of white people (cf. Menon 2020). Overall, food insecurity in the US has almost doubled in 2020, from 35 to 54 million, due to record unemployment and underemployment. Food banks and street kitchens reported a sharp increase in demand and long queues (Lakhani and Singh 2020).

Inequalities between nations in their crisis response capability are also stark. Developing nations have a larger proportion of workers in informal and precarious employment, and governments lack the financial reserves to support them with social security payments adequately or for a prolonged period, if at all. In India, for example, the proportion and overall number of families made food insecure by unemployment was much greater than in the US, but the state could not afford to provide income supplements on anywhere near the scale of the $2 trillion CARES Act which the US Congress passed in March 2020 (Cochrane and Stolberg 2020). Admittedly government support is not just about means, it is also a matter of political will. In Australia, for example, 40.000 homeless people who were deemed at high risk of infection were given emergency accommodation in vacant hotels, while in the UK, despite a homeless population more than twice the size, only 33.000 were assisted in this way (Pawson and Martin 2021).

What is particularly worrying about the current situation of developing countries is that, as of September 2020, 84% of the IMF's Covid-19 loans were encouraging, and in some cases outright requiring countries to adopt austerity measures in the aftermath of the health crisis (Oxfam 2021). Such austerity measures, as we have learnt from the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, are likely to entrench newly increased levels of poverty. In short, loans may increase the capability of poorer countries to respond to the immediate threat of the pandemic – which is in the interest of the lenders given that the disease needs to be controlled globally –, but it may come at the expense of increasing the second-

ary, economic impact. Pandemic related government debt will also present an additional burden on national budgets in the developing world for many years to come, a burden made more difficult in the wake of a rising US dollar due to the pandemic and then again due to the next global crisis – the war in Ukraine. Governments already financially stressed in the wake of the pandemic face additional food security risks created by this war, which has blocked supply from two fairly large grain exporting nations. The impact of these supply disruptions is often exaggerated, however, and are in fact too small to explain the rise in global hunger.

The other side of the story of inequality is also worthy of consideration. While recovery for the world's poorest people could take over a decade, America's 651 billionaires increased their net worth by 30% to 4 trillion USD during the pandemic, while the richest American, Elon Musk, increased his wealth by 481.7% between 18 March and 7 December 2020 (ATF/IPS 2020). Following the release of massive stimulus packages, paid for by debt accruing to the general public, and with the help of quantitative easing and interest rate reductions by many major central banks, share markets returned to their pre-pandemic highs in just nine months, to the delight of wealthy investors. Tax avoidance and the use of tax havens ensured that little of this windfall translated into increased state revenue. This is causing uncounted fatalities because distributing the Covid-induced wealth increase of the ten richest billionaires alone, according to Oxfam (2021), would have been enough to prevent anyone on earth from falling into poverty, as well as pay for vaccinating every human being.

The lethal consequences of the contemporary state of rampant inequality revealed by the work of Thomas Piketty (2013) were thus illustrated by the pandemic, but the latter also caused inequality to soar. While the Covid pandemic has spared no region, economic or social group, it has not been an indiscriminate threat but has deepened and widened an underlying global crisis of inequality (Reuter 2021). Existing differences in income, wealth, social protection and general resilience both within and between countries increased rapidly during the pandemic. As Bisoffi et al. (2021, 3) put it, "precarity was added to precarity." Indeed, the pandemic marks the first time since records began that inequality rose in virtually every country on earth at the same time. It is estimated that the total number of people living in poverty increased by between 200 and 500 million in 2020 alone (Oxfam 2021). One is left to wonder why the number of people subject to hunger was not higher than it was.

This question is vital, given that an end to inequality, while possible in principle (below), is not likely to be achieved in the near future. How then do the most vulnerable survive in a crisis, what are their safe havens, and how can policy be adjusted to protect the safety nets that ameliorate the worst impacts of inequality in a crisis?

An Unloved Informal Safety Net: Urban to Rural Migration During the Pandemic

The only reason why vulnerable populations in Asia and elsewhere were not affected as severely as might have been expected is that much of the available 'systemic resilience' is in fact relies not on formal state interventions but on poorly understood informal processes. Perhaps the most important informal safety net of all is rural economies, and small-scale farmers in particular. It is on family farms where many millions found refuge, and yet we do not tend to acknowledge the massive service this sector delivers in times of crisis nor do we know precisely how it works or where and under what circumstances it may fail.

State-sponsored economic development has generally favoured the accumulation of capital and, in the rural sector, the accumulation of land in the hands of fewer, larger mega-farms and agribusinesses (Oxfam 2021). State and international 'green revolution' policy in the post WW2 period thus has contributed to a general decline of tight knit, small farmer communities with strong mutual moral obligations (Reuter, in press). Vast numbers of farmers gave up their profession and migrated to the large cities where most ended up in precarious employment. Dramatic reversals of these long-standing trends, however, could be observed in the wake of the 2019–2022 pandemic, in Asia – where the author has conducted ethnographic research for more than 30 years – and around the world.

A very powerful systemic adjustment indeed was triggered at the nexus of agriculture, food security and labour mobility by the pandemic. This is highly relevant to the present discussion about the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, because this impact, devastating though it may have been, was in fact to a very large extent mitigated by the fact that the rural sector absorbed tens of millions of laid off urban workers. This safety net was especially important in developing countries, where the crisis was most severely felt and where the state was unable to fully support their populations through the crisis with cash payments.

In India, for example, decades of rural-to-urban labour migration went into reverse in a matter of days as urban workers were laid off in lockdowns. Without government support, the majority were compelled to seek refuge on family farms to avoid starvation. 10 million urban workers fled to the countryside during the first wave in 2020, with half a million riding bicycles or walking back to their villages (Cariappa et al. 2021). The first images associated with Covid-19 were thus not of medical staff in hospitals, "but of migrant laborers trudging back to their villages hundreds of miles away, lugging their belongings" (Kugler and Sinha 2020, 1).

The situation was similar in Indonesia. While the distances and numbers were not quite as great, essentially the same kind of mass exodus of precariously employed urban workers occurred (Rozaki 2020). The urban precariat of the megalopolis of Jakarta and of other large cities fled mainly to rural Java or their islands of origin. Workers laid-off from the country's major tourism centre in southern Bali similarly retreated to the island's rural hinterland as the radical decline of international mobility and national lockdowns led to the lay-off of the vast majority of tourism workers in Bali, and on a lesser scale in Java and other popular destinations. The collapse in tourism indeed affected the entire region. Between 1.5 and 2 trillion USD of GDP income and up to 106.7 million tourism and travel jobs were lost in the Asia-Pacific Region in 2020 (WTTC 2020:1).

Similarly, the pandemic drove precariously employed workers from the cities to rural areas in Nepal, but two other sectors were also major sources of reverse labour migration. In Nepal remittances from international labour migrants account for 35% of GDP, and tourism for 8%, and the combined effect of the pandemic on these sectors threatened 31.2% of the population with extreme poverty (Ranjit et al.2020). Tens of thousands of tourism workers suddenly had nowhere to go other than the countryside (Gadal et al. 2020), and many thousands of Nepali international migrant workers too returned from Malaysia and Gulf States to their home villages, relying on farming for food security and livelihoods. Although the agricultural sector was itself disrupted by lockdowns, it thus was forced to absorb masses of laid-off urban, tourism and migrant labour, causing farmers to call for emergency impact assessments (Timilsina and Ghimire 2020).

While the US, EU and Australia could afford to pay trillions of USD in social support to mitigate the impact of mass lay-offs, Indian, Nepali and Indonesian governments, like others across the Global South, could not afford to support their millions of suddenly unemployed workers to a comparable extent. Even in the Global North, massive financial support schemes (such as the 'Job Keeper' scheme in Australia) are very costly and will be unsuitable in the face of the more long-term crises we can expect in the near future, such as ever more severe and frequent floods and droughts in the wake of escalating climate change.

The last resort of taking refuge within rural support networks is, but should not be, taken for granted. In African countries, where small farms were simultaneously struck by climate change-induced drought and years of policy neglect, rural communities could not withstand an influx of millions of unemployed urban workers and hence few took this option (Ginsberg et al. 2022). Instead, the pandemic accelerated an already rising level of mass starvation in rural areas and a growing refugee crisis, with no end in sight (Reuter 2021). It is of vital interest also to wealthier countries to facilitate resilience-enhancing policy responses in Asia and Africa that will address the domestic causes and

thus help prevent potential transnational refugee crises. Research is essential here as a way to determine the dynamic trends in emergent systems, because the concept of resilience (within social-ecological systems) views people as adapting, innovating and self-organising to persist in the face of a major disturbance (Folke 2006).

Small-scale farming is the backbone of rural resilience to external shocks in the Global South, and it has served as an effective buffer for labour disruptions in many recent crises, certainly in Asia (Plahe et al. 2017). It is a safety net that – for now – can still absorb a vast amount of labour in a short amount of time and provide alternative food security and livelihoods. But how much longer? While small farmers deserve support for providing this safety net, they are in fact increasingly side-lined due to the influence of a large agribusiness lobby on state policy-making everywhere. This is a problem not only during times of acute crisis, but also for food security in general, because the food supply depends largely on small farmers who produce 2/3 of the world's food on only 1/3 of available farmland and with only a small fraction of total government subsidies (FAO 2018, Reuter 2015, MacRae 2016a), as well as generally producing healthier types of food (the analysis is similar for small fishers, see Braun 2008). Small farms produce most of the kind of healthy and fresh food that public health advocates recommend for our diet, whereas industrially produced and over-processed food has been identified as a main driver of steeply rising mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Asia and elsewhere, but also of reduced resilience to Covid-19 and other infections (Baumer et al. 2020). A vital and multi-dimensional safety net is thus being undermined at a time when we can expect ever more frequent crises, most notably due to climate change.

The need for resilient safety nets is growing as a result of rising economic inequality, and yet there is a glaring absence of research on informal safety nets. There are no in-depth studies of where Asia's 107 million laid-off tourism workers went, nor the several 100 millions of lockdown-escaping urban workers and grounded migrant workers. We do not know much about what they experienced, what solutions they found in order to survive, how many returned to the sector or stayed in agriculture, or the effects on their host communities. Exact figures are not yet available because the pandemic has also delayed collection of national census data in all three countries (FAO 2021b), but a massive influx into the family farm agricultural sector has been reported in the local media.

There are a few preliminary studies and media reports (e.g. Rozaki 2020) confirming that agriculture and other rural livelihoods were vital for workers who lost their income, and that links to rural communities thus served as a survival strategy of last resort (Rozaki 2020). The main reason why farms were attractive to the unemployed is because the most immediate expression of eco-

nomic vulnerability during the pandemic was food insecurity, certainly in Asia. Most of the world's food is produced and consumed in Asia and according to the 2021 "State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World" report, half of the 2.37 billion people who are moderately or severely food insecure, reside in Asia (FAO 2021a). The lockdown during the pandemic aggravated this problem by eliminating millions of livelihoods across Asia. Those in "low paid and unstable employment and without significant household savings were also the most likely to become unemployed and instantly food insecure, not to mention housing, education and health insecurity" (Reuter 2021, 149). Close to 928 million people were severely food insecure in 2020, a staggering 148 million more than in 2019, with 57 million of them in Asia (FAO 2021a), and by the end of 2020 about 9000 people died there every day due to additional hunger associated with the pandemic (Oxfam 2021). The future resilience of Asia thus will depend on the ability of people and governments to address agri-food systems-related challenges, which intersect with labour and public health issues.

Family farms and village communities are the traditional productive and social units of rural landscapes, but both have been deeply affected and (mostly) weakened over the past half-century by labour out-migration and state policies based on a techno-capitalist approach, which favours food system industrialisation, ever larger agro-businesses, expensive inputs (seed, chemicals) and large capital investments in machinery. Food systems in Asia and everywhere are now contained within and constrained by this techno-capitalist model. This model is promoted by a handful of huge corporations, multilateral organisations such as IMF, World Bank, WTO, FAO and other UN agencies, and an international network of agricultural research organisations. Since the end of the colonial era, these powerful actors have shaped agri-food development in most developing countries and continue to do so. Market penetration and price-cutting by powerful agri-food players were not prevented by the WTO (World Trade Organisation) trade rules agreed in the Doha Round (Clapp 2006) and small farmers are also disadvantaged by lack of access to finance and state subsidies (Hawkes and Plahe, 2013; Plahe et al. 2021). Ironically much of the poverty and malnutrition in Asia is among farming communities in rural villages (Bhagwati and Panagariya 2013, 31; Costa 2012, 25; Dreze and Sen 2013, 19). The urban poor too are primarily from rural farming families who can no longer sustain their farm-based livelihoods in the face of inequitable competition, lack of land, and government interference to keep food prices low (often below production costs) at the expense of farmers. Agriculture was thus already in crisis when the pandemic struck; the latter only exposed fragilities associated with the techno-capitalist model. During this crisis, nevertheless, it was family farms rather than agribusinesses that protected the most vulnerable, preventing more severe political and social unrest.

The way people have survived this and other recent crises suggests that governments may need to reconsider current policies that are hostile to smallholders and perhaps reverse their push for corporatisation, a model that undermines crisis resilience and is accompanied by a host of other negative side-effects such as rural depopulation, small farmer disenfranchisement and ecological destruction by the use of unsustainable production methods and land-use change. While macro-level analysis of the crisis has begun (FAO 2021b), there is a need to further document and analyse the situation from the bottom-up – in the very locations the migrants returned to, which are simultaneously the sites of a pre-existing agricultural and rural livelihood crisis.

One of the ironies is that, prior to the pandemic, the farm sector's increasingly aged workforce had become a worry to governments all over Asia (Rigg et al. 2019). Preliminary reports from India (Goswami et al. 2021) and Nepal (Gadal et al. 2020) suggest the pandemic-induced influx addressed this lack of labour and that, while many of the returnees lacked the requisite skills, others brought new ideas and innovative approaches. Often such innovation points toward more sustainable food production and shorter supply chains. In other cases, however, desperation led to destructive exploitation of natural assets (Duguma et al. 2021).

Global food security challenges and the decline of small-scale agriculture and rural livelihoods are not new (although they await sustainable solutions). What is new is the unique opportunity afforded by the massive, world-wide return migration sparked by the pandemic. Some of those who reverse-migrated have vowed never to return to the cities. New possibilities for returning migrants to build climate-resistant agri-food systems have thus arisen but a more supportive policy environment is also needed (Blay-Palmer et al. 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

What can be done? The World Bank has calculated that if countries were to act now to reduce inequality, then poverty could return to pre-Covid crisis levels in just three years rather than in over a decade (see Oxfam 2021). The benefits, however, would go far beyond simply ameliorating the present external shock created by the pandemic.

When it comes to the reduction of disaster risk and disaster impacts from crises of all kinds and at all levels, lowering inequality is among the best strategies available. A healthy and economically secure population with a high level of solidarity has the best chance of facing unexpected challenges. Indeed, the evolutionary success story of the human species is largely based on our exceptional capacity to communicate and collaborate in a systematic and rules-based

manner (Reuter 2017). This is reflected in the need for moral foundations as an enabling condition for a healthy economic system, as has been argued by a long line of theorists from Adam Smith (2002 [1759]) to E.P. Thompson (1993).

The English historian E.P. Thompson went beyond Adam Smith's foundational work on moral sentiments as a foundation of human economies, by developing the concept of 'moral economy', the idea that economics was traditionally considered a means to serve moral principles. Thompson' work was later popularized in social science by James C. Scott (1976) in his book 'The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia' (see also Scott 1985). By 'moral economy', Scott means the way in which economic needs, and especially food security, are in practice socially experienced as a pattern of moral rights or expectations (see also MacRae 2016b). Indeed, as human beings our success as a species is built on social solidarity, and hence we are hard-wired to expect economies to broadly serve the needs of all participants, not just a privileged few. There is no real alternative anyway, given that history shows how severely inequitable economies tend to become unstable sooner or later, as is evident – for example – from the current rise of right-wing populism in the US and Europe (Jacobs et al. 2018). Radical individual wealth and income inequality also undermines consumption and hence, as the World Economic Forum – hardly known as an anti-capitalist think tank – has pointed out, the present version of robber baron capitalism is likely to destroy itself (Gensler 2017). The UN has also recognised the issue, for example in the World Inequality Report produced by the UNDP-supported World Inequality Lab (WIL 2022).

Inequality between nations also needs to be addressed. While some national and local government actors with intermediate-level resources may of course decide to raise organisational preparedness or adjust their budgetary priorities so as to maximise their crisis response capability, many countries simply cannot afford to adopt supportive policy measures on the scale that is required. Targeted international post-Covid reconstruction aid and loan amnesties may be needed to enable and encourage all jurisdictions to take necessary action, such as improving public health services or supporting the unemployed or strengthening rural economies. Such international funding should be provided in conjunction with mandatory measures to curb inequality, given that inequality is a major amplifier of crisis impacts.

Measures to curb inequality will improve general, long-term resilience not just to pandemics but to other challenges as well, such as climate change or food supply disruptions. This realisation, unfortunately, has not yet reached many parts of the science community that have significant influence on policy (see Berkes 2007; Hodbod and Eakin 2015; and Pauley et al. 2019). For example, the recent report by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, working in partnership with the International Science Council, recently produced a

53-page report on 'Pathways to a sustainable and resilient world' (Sperling et al. 2020). This major report only mentions inequality once in passing, and does not make any recommendations on this key issue.

Unless determined policy action is taken at multiple levels to address inequality, this 'mother of all crises' is set to amount to an act of structural homicide on a massive scale in this crisis-stricken 21st century. The ideology that likes to call on each of us personally and on each nation to be responsible for our own resilience and disaster preparedness is obviously flawed, when power, wealth and income are distributed so very unequally to begin with. But this same ideology has long kept us from recognising inequality reduction as a key element of disaster risk reduction as well as general development and prosperity.

And, yes, there is much hard evidence to prove that, with sufficient political will, inequality can certainly be reduced (Brungs 2018). Let us therefore insist on it: Solidarity and Equality, not crisis-induced 'Hunger Games'! To insist on this, is not even to adopt a charitable but simply a rational approach. Curbing inequality will benefit us all by boosting human security. As Pope Francis put it in in his recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, "the notion of 'every man for himself' will rapidly degenerate into a free-for-all that will prove worse than any pandemic" (Pope Francis 2020, 10). The same could be said of other crises, such as climate change or ecological collapse. A race to the bottom will destroy what little chance we have to weather the many storms that await us in the coming decades.

The rural economy as a source of resilience in times of crisis is also underestimated and underexplored, particularly regarding the Covid pandemic. While inequality remains at the present high level, however, such informal safety nets need to be strengthened. Supporting diverse and more sustainable small farmer agriculture needs to be made a priority. More specifically, this should take the form of better access to finance, technical services, state subsidies and tax breaks.

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Zašto je socijalna pravda najuspešniji način ublažavanja posledica katastrofa: Pouke pandemije

Pandemija kovida-19 pokazala je da posledice sistemske krize umnogome zavise od opšteg nivoa nejednakosti u datom društvu. U ovom radu prikazano je kako je, kada je hrana u pitanju, kupovna moć miliona ljudi znatno smanjena zbog gubitka prihoda usled pandemije, kao i posledice toga. Analiza političke ekonomije krize baca svetlo na to kako ekonomska nejednakost deluje kao snažni pojačivač efekata katastrofe kod ugroženih pojedinaca i populacija. Degradacija životne sredine, u širokom spektru od klimatskih promena do gubitka biodiverziteta, na sličan način deluje kao pojačivač efekata kako kod ove tako i kod većine drugih kriza. Ekonomski ugrožene osobe su neposrednije izložene efektima ekološke degradacije ili pak mogu biti primorane da zanemare potrebu za zaštitom prirode, što znači da se ova dva faktora uzajamno pojačavaju. Nejednakost bukvalno ubija ljude, posebno u ovom veku sve gorih višedimenzionalnih kriza. U radu se tvrdi da nejednakost ovih razmera nije samo nemoralna već ugrožava bezbednost čovečanstva, čak i u slučaju relativno privilegovanih populacionih grupa, kao i stabilnost međunarodnih odnosa. Stoga je rešavanje

problema nejednakosti, a naročito nepravične politike u ruralnom sektoru koji proizvodi hranu i koji je imao ulogu bitne sigurnosne mreže za siromašne tokom pandemijskog zaključavanja, najbolji način za ublažavanje budućih kriza i njihovih posledica po prehrambenu bezbednost.

Ključne reči: kovid-19, nejednakost, ublažavanje posledica katastrofe, ljudska bezbednost, rezilijentnost, sitni farmeri kao sigurnosna mreža.

Pourquoi la justice sociale est-elle le moyen le plus efficace d'atténuer les conséquences des catastrophes: Leçons morales de la pandémie

La pandémie de covid-19 a montré que les conséquences d'une crise systémique dépendent largement du niveau général d'inégalité dans une société donnée. Dans ce travail est présenté comment, lorsqu'il s'agit de nourriture, le pouvoir d'achat des millions de gens a considérablement diminué en raison de la perte des revenus due à la pandémie, ainsi que les conséquences qui en découlent. L'analyse de l'économie politique de la crise met en lumière la manière dont l'inégalité économique agit comme un amplificateur puissant des effets de la catastrophe auprès des individus et des populations menacées. La dégradation du milieu de vie, présentant un large éventail de modalités – depuis les changements climatiques jusqu'à la perte de la biodiversité – agit comme un amplificateur des effets aussi bien dans cette crise que dans la plupart des autres. Les personnes économiquement menacées sont exposées plus directement aux effets de la dégradation écologique ou encore peuvent être obligées de négliger le besoin de protéger la nature, ce qui signifie que ces deux facteurs s'amplifient réciproquement. L'inégalité littéralement tue les hommes, particulièrement dans ce siècle des crises pluridimensionnelles de plus en plus graves. Dans le travail on affirme que l'inégalité à de telles proportions non seulement est immorale mais elle menace la sécurité de l'humanité, même lorsqu'il s'agit des groupes de population relativement privilégiés, et menace également la stabilité des relations internationales. C'est pourquoi résoudre le problème de l'inégalité, et surtout de la politique injuste dans le secteur rural produisant la nourriture et prenant le rôle d'un filet de sécurité important pour les démunis au cours du confinement pandémique, est la meilleure manière pour atténuer les crises futures et leurs conséquences pour la sécurité alimentaire.

Mots clés: covid-19, inégalité, atténuation des conséquences de la catastrophe, sécurité des hommes, résilience, petits fermiers comme réseau de sécurité.

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