

08-Jan-2021

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The Multilateral System and COVID-19: What are we doing and where are we going?

Dear Dr. Bump,

Thank you for sending us this paper and giving us the chance to consider your work. We sent it out for external peer review.

Unfortunately we do not consider it suitable for publication in its present form. However if you are able to amend it in the light of our and/or reviewers' comments, we would be happy to consider it again.

The reviewer's comments are at the end of this letter.

The editors' comments are listed below:

1 You should explain what you mean by the multilateral system and why you have chosen these four organisations to analyse.

2 Some more explanation of how these organisations complement each other/divide responsibilities would help

3 You make some interesting observations about what didn't work and where the problems may lie but you don't offer a path forward. Can you please make an attempt at this? It might lay out several options.

We hope that you will be willing to revise your manuscript and submit it by 12th January. When submitting your revised manuscript please provide a point by point response to our comments and those of any reviewers. We also ask that you keep the revised manuscript within the word count of 1800-2000 words.

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I hope you will find the comments useful. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Kamran Abbasi
kabbasi@bmj.com

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Reviewer: 1

Recommendation:

Comments:

BMJ Review by Bruce Currey

'The Multilateral System and COVID-19: What are we doing and where are we going?

This highly relevant analysis piece entitled 'The Multilateral System and COVID-19: What are we doing and where are we going?' is written by three distinguished authors at three northern health institutions. Their argument, as expressed in their Standfirst is: 'The COVID pandemic has raised questions about the performance of international institutions. The mixed patchwork of achievements and mis-steps points mainly to limited agreement and low solidarity among the powerful nations that dominate the governance of these institutions'.

At present the argument

- does not analyse 'the multilateral system' and 'international institutions', but rather analyses four 'international health institutions', viz: World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, Gavi the Vaccine Alliance and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. There is no analysis of international institutions such as, the UN Security Council 1, the International Finance Institutions or Regional Institutions like the African Union.

- analyses COVID-19 as a 'pandemic' rather than a 'syndemic'² so that despite the key words 'political economy' suggesting distribution^{3,4} and deprivation, what is missing is lines of accountability linking the 'multilateral system' with the vulnerability, susceptibility and adaptability of the parents of future generations^{5,6} living in deprived areas such as Amapá in Brazil or Sikkim in India.

- Has performance outcomes measured in terms of deaths and dollars, viz: 'More than 10,000 people are dying daily and the world economy is forecast to lose as much as \$22 trillion in 2020 alone'. These are not important 'health' outcomes. ('Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being'). These may be values very different from those of future generations.

Suggestions for the authors to consider to strengthen their argument include:

- Giving a decision-making voice at the e-Security Council of a 'multi-lateral system' to involve potential parents living in deprived areas of the world in articulating the health and well-being needs of their future generations.
- Seizing the opportunity of the 'COVID-19' pandemic to transform all international institutions to invest in 'GRAVID-21' to improve the pre-conception and pre-natal health and wellbeing of future generations.
- Approaching outcome measures of human value holistically, integrating short-term pandemic and each individual's long-term health background of impersonal forces together.

Suggested References

1. UN Security Council (2020) Secretary-General Highlights 'Essential' Failure of International Cooperation, in Address to Security Council Meeting on Post-Coronavirus Global Governance. SC/14312 24 SEPTEMBER. New York.
2. Horton R (2020) Offline: COVID-19 is not a pandemic. *Lancet*. 2020 26 September-2 October; 396(10255): 874.
3. Public Health England (2020) Disparities_in_the_risk_and_outcomes_of_COVID_August_2020_update
4. Bamba C, Riordan R, Ford J, Matthews F (2020) The COVID-19 pandemic and health inequalities. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 74: 964-968.
5. Dashraath P, Nielsen-Saines K, Madhi SA, Baud D (2020) COVID-19 vaccines and neglected pregnancy. *Lancet*. 396 (10252): e22.
6. Knight M, Morris RK, Furniss J, Chappell LC (2020) Include pregnant women in research—particularly covid-19 research. *BMJ* 2020;370:m3305.
7. Carney, M (2020) From Covid Crisis to Renaissance Lecture 3. BBC Reith Lectures Radio 4. 6th December. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0900yrv>

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