

Covid-19: Challenge to SDG and Globalization

by

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Abstract

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, economies have been on lockdown, schools have been under lock and key while cross border trades have been on standstill. The aviation and tourist industry have been worst hit by the pandemic. The poor are becoming poorer, the inequality in the health system is more pronounced. Private businesses are closing up while government interventions seem not enough and there are massive job losses. Using the conceptual approach, the research tried to analyze the challenges facing the attainment of sustainable development goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 10 and globalization in the face of Covid-19. It is found that healthy living, inequality, globalization, etc. are affected by Covid-19 and the poor and vulnerable becomes poorer as job losses increase. The researchers have been able to suggest ways forward which is not limited to the adoption of innovative ways of living, doing business, a reassessment of our relationship with nature, increased budgetary expenditure on education, tax holidays.

Keywords: Covid-19, SDG, Globalization, Inequality, Health, Poverty, Education.

Introduction:

In January 2020, the world woke up to the news of a pneumonia-like pandemic ravaging Wuhan, China. According to the World Health Organization, WHO, on 31st December 2019 its country office in China got a report that pneumonia of unknown cause was detected in Wuhan (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). On the 30th of January, 2020 WHO declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern thus announcing a name for it on the 11th February, 2020 as Covid-19. Since world war 11 this pandemic is considered humanity's greatest challenge. Countries are battling all odds to contain its spread. All spheres of life have been disrupted – educationally, health-wise, socially, and economically. Its effect has been much on people in vulnerable societies. The economic impact of COVID-19 on China with the attendant spillovers across its borders to other continents and countries via trade, capital flows, job losses, and increased risks in the global financial markets has been devastating (WHO, 2020; McKibbin & Fernando, 2020).

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Researches abound that supports Covid-19 as an economic disrupter as the responsiveness of financial markets to the plunging of global stock indices changes has been instantaneous, while companies have experienced production interruption and contraction, transportation is restricted among countries and among all, consumption patterns are distorted thereby creating anomalies in the market orchestrated by consumers and firms panic (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020; Levine & McKibbin, 2020; Boonem, 2020; Baldwin & Weder di Mauro, 2020). In studying the impact of Covid-19 on socio-economic mobility in Indonesia, Prawoto et al (2020) found that Covid-19 decreased socio-economic activities while reducing income with the attendant strong correlation between pandemic tested positive of Covid-19 and mortality rate, hence they called for increased state expenditures and tax incentives in reducing Covid-19 impact. As inappropriate macroeconomic policy measures sparked inflation that culminated in the economic problems of the 1970s not just oil shock, the response to Covid-19 has not been satisfactory. The global economies are interconnected, hence a shock in one economy sends a wave of downturn events in the others as all these economies are connected by the cross-border flow of goods, services, know-how, people, financial capital, foreign direct investment², international banking and exchange rates (Baldwin & Weder di Mauro, 2020).

With Covid-19 affecting all spheres of life, there is an increased GDP loss by countries (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020) meaning that poverty is on the increase, there is hunger, the health of individuals and societies are at risk, education and other forms of meaningful living is at risk. In other words, the Sustainability Development Goals,³ is being impacted negatively. According to Ndubuisi-Okolo & Anekwe (2018), poverty which is conceptualized as the inability of an individual or a family to command sufficient resources to satisfy basic needs remains a huge threat to humanity, hence the quest for sustainable economic growth is impeded without alleviating it.

Sustainability Development being that development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to respond or meet their needs (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; Abbas, 2011; Roorda et al, 2012; Luukkanen et al, 2015), with this definition, researchers argue that welfare seen in the context of inter-generational equity should be the basic argument and not environmental concerns, though the environmental concerns are important too (Luukkanen et al, 2015).

Sustainability has been seen to be concerned with the tension between peoples personal aspirations towards better living and that of limitations imposed by nature (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; Roorda et al, 2012), to the Politicians sustainable development is a term referring to community projects, however, the businessman sees it as effective production of goods and services while the environmentalist views it as a means of enabling efficient and effective use of natural resources. To the masses, sustainability development is a means of meeting their needs as well as a strategy for alleviating poverty (Kwasi, 2014).

Sustainability as a concept meaning not compromising the future because of the present in resource usage permeates all facets of life, hence the symbiotic relationship among all the sectors: environmental, economic, etc. cannot be overemphasized. Whether sustainability is weak or strong, they do not oppose each other rather they need to complement each other, thus centering the debate on the problems of sustainability (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; Luukkanen et al, 2015). With the introduction of social distancing as a precautionary measure to containing the pandemic, economies have been shut down, societies have been on lockdown. In all these, vulnerable people are worst hit by these measures. Covid-19 has exposed the inadequacies of the once thought of to

² FDI

³ SDG forthwith

be big and developed economies too, especially as it relates to meeting the Sustainability Development Goals, (SDG), goal 3 – Good health, and wellbeing (Roorda et al, 2012). The frailty of the healthcare system is at the front burner showcasing lack of equipment, inadequate hospital spaces, understaffing of healthcare givers with the antecedent of uninsured citizens, and a few uncommitted health workers. It is clear that the contingency plan against pandemics is non-existent as there seems to be no coordinated action plan with authorities to better respond in terms of personnel, equipment, medical supplies, etc.

The Sustainability Development Goals, (SDG), goal 4, which stresses quality education (Roorda et al, 2012) is not left out in the line-up as the global education system has been affected. Many schools have been shut down with examinations postponed while Universities and Colleges are not left out. Least Developed Countries, (LDC), and developing countries, where students lack basic shelter, clothing, and access to the internet are the most disadvantaged. Thus, the inequality is glaring and defeats the objectives of SDG goal 4 with e-learning platforms rising in popularity (Daly et al, 2020; Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020).

Inequality and globalization are not spared by Covid-19. Inequality which is the unequal or uneven distribution (Jantti & Jenkins, 2010) of certain metrics be it social disparity, wealth disparity, political or health disparity have been brought to the fore by Covid-19. The long-existing and persisting health inequality in our societies with its main casualties being those facing socio-economic challenges or living in deprivation have been brought to the front burner by Covid-19 (Gabrijelcic, 2020). However, it is pertinent that all sectors join forces to make changes that will protect workforces, people's needs, and sustainability of the health systems. Inequality breeds poverty and hence cannot be wished away.

Globalization on the other hand which is the interdependence of nations based on free trade is another aspect greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is factual that globalization through the cross-border trades have been able to create jobs across borders hence brought about economic growth, in some countries while denying others by stifling some industries. The shutting down of economies across borderlines, industries et al is a result of globalization as it has created a world of interdependence (Bloom, 2020). While economies had become richer and millions raised out of poverty by globalization, its interdependence makes all economies vulnerable once there is a shock in one economy. As the Covid-19 epidemic ravaged, the supply chains become broken via border closures and shutdowns, alternative goods locally produced become high in demand, hence the cost too.

Covid-19 has exposed that globalization's contagion risk is high in whatever form – economic, health, financial, trade, etc. In their study on the effect of globalization on the incidence of in-work poverty in advanced European countries, Hellier & Kalugina (2015) argued that globalization has a positive effect on in-work poverty based on trade with emerging countries. The outbreak of Covid-19 and the actions that follow in combating it may be questioning the work by Hellier & Kalugina, but the fact remains that once borders are opened, the trade will be on the increase and may surpass what it used to be as demand by countries will be on the increase.

ESCAP⁴ in its paper on 29 April 2020 argued that though COVID-19 has claimed so many lives, the speed at which economic activities are collapsing is unprecedented and never seen before. They, therefore, advocated for a coordinated stimulus package; continued stabilization of the financial markets by continuous injection of needed liquidity by government and monetary authorities and finally rebuilding better towards sustainable development in many aspects. According to them, these three immediate actions will ensure adequate finance is channeled to

⁴ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

support progress on SDG and the needs of the citizens. ESCAP encouraged a multilateral action by countries and actors in coming together for rebuilding a better world that ensures healthy economic, social, and financial well-being for all as the ultimate goal of the SDG.

Therefore the objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of Covid-19 on SDG Goals and suggest ways forward. Given the arguments in many quarters that Covid-19 is a laboratory creation, while some equally accuse China that they deliberately hid facts about the virus and the fact that it has actually caused countries to go into a technical recession, limited cross-border trade hence limiting globalization, increased poverty and inequality, this study, therefore, makes a significant contribution to knowledge as it x-rays the impact of Covid-19 on sustainable development goals, (SDG) and globalization.

Methodology:

This study in attempting to x-ray the disruptions caused by Covid-19 towards globalization and attaining the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), adopted a conceptual approach. This approach is exploratory in nature and is anchored on discoveries of ideas and insights based on the facts on the ground. Materials were sourced through the internet, textbooks, presentations, and other documents relevant to this study.

Covid-19 Linkage with SDG:

We already know that the SDG was adopted to follow the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2006-2015. The SDG includes 17 sustainable development goals which are interdependent as summarized in Goal 17 (Roorda et al, 2012). We will discuss the impact of Covid-19 on SDG goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 10.



Fig 1: Covid-19 Linkage with SDG and Globalization

Table 1 Sustainable Development Goals and Their Explanations

Goal No	Description
1	Poverty Eradication
2	Hunger Eradication
3	Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages
4	Ensure Inclusive and Quality Education for all and Promote Lifelong Learning
8	Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Employment and Decent Work for All
10	Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries

Covid-19 and Poverty Eradication:

According to Halpern-Meekin (2020), one in five that had jobs in February 2020 lost their jobs within a short period while above half a million people in Wisconsin lost theirs too. The fact remains that poverty rises with jobs disappearance. With many people losing their jobs as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the implication is that many more families fall below the poverty line. However, the policy response from governments at all levels determines how many families fall below the poverty line. A well-planned anti-poverty policy is necessary for lifting more people out of poverty rather than allowing them below the poverty line.

It is the desire of the UN to reduce poverty in all its forms by 2030, exactly what the SDG goal 1 is all about: to promote equal rights of access to economic resources and to appropriate social protection systems for all using the correct policy framework (Roorda et al, 2012; Ghosh, 2020).

The UN through the use of enhanced development cooperation and resource mobilization from various sources aims to close the poverty gap especially for the vulnerable and people living in the Least Developed Countries, (LDCs). However, with the advent of Covid-19, we have seen the rich and developed countries coming to the assistance of their citizens in so many ways. Is this the same in the least developed and underdeveloped countries? Of course, the answer is no. How then can the UN maintain its trajectory regarding the SDG goal 1? As long as there exists a link between healthy living (goal 3) and poverty eradication (goal 1), then the SDG goal 1 will be a mirage without meeting up with healthy living.

COVID-19 and Hunger Eradication:

As the pandemic and lockdown persist leading to mass unemployment, plummeting incomes, food production disruption, and humanitarian aid decline, more of the world's poorest people are plunged deeper into hunger and poverty. This increases the mortality figures arising from hunger. The outbreak of Covid-19 has increased food insecurity in the United States with many children exposed to hunger (Barber, 2020; Bauer, 2020). These assertions show that Covid-19 is a threat to the UN Sustainable Development Goal, (SDG) goal 2 (Roorda et al, 2012) which stipulates to achieve zero hunger worldwide by 2030.

Food security and hunger are fundamental to all countries, governments, and large organizations. Food commodities markets are not properly functioning during Covid-19 lockdown and there is the existence of trade restrictions not only in agricultural products but almost all commodities, shortages exist in some while outright ban in some too. There is the existential challenge arising from these restrictions regarding hunger and food security, though there are arguments in some quarters that it has brought about local and homegrown consumption patterns, but can this be sustainable?

COVID-19 and Healthy Lives and Well-Being for all:

As Covid-19 keeps harming public health by affecting those that tested positive, behavioral changes are frustratingly slow while the reach of Covid-19 is widespread. There is a drop in physical activity, and social interactions are deepening hence exceeding the direct impact of Covid-19 as it worsens health and well-being. This however makes people more susceptible to the complications of Covid-19 (Stafford, 2020).

There is a high toll on health worldwide arising from Covid-19 where about six million people are infected and more than three hundred thousand deaths as of May 2020 (WHO). The acute shortages of hospital spaces, lack of equipment, inadequate number of health care personnel, and uninsured citizens have exposed the fragility of the healthcare systems worldwide. Since there is a concerted effort globally in finding a vaccine, it is important to note that lockdown and social distancing have helped in flattening the curve. The way forward will be to have contingency plans against pandemics. This will help in responding in a faster, efficient, and effective way in terms of personnel, equipment, and medical supplies. There should be insurance policy covers for private healthcare systems while encouraging a healthier lifestyle.

Covid-19 and Inclusive Education:

Taking a look at the following quote:

“The global lockdown of education institutions is going to cause major (and likely unequal) interruption in students’ learning; disruptions in internal assessments; and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative” (Burgess, & Sievertsen, 2020).

The above quotation from Burgess and Silverstein is a mirror through which we have seen the impact of Covid-19 on education and the inequality thereof. An estimated 1.25 billion students/pupils are directly affected by the Covid-19 outbreak thus affecting the education system globally. Many schools, colleges, and universities have been shut down with many postponing their examinations, there is a reduction in international students enrolment, disruption of the academic calendar at all levels, cancellation of local and international conferences, thus creating teaching and learning gap, loss of educational manpower with a corresponding educational budget cut (Ogunode et al, 2020). This is popularizing e-learning hence making vulnerable students in need of basic shelter, clothing, and lacking access to the internet disadvantaged. Some students have been emotionally and mentally affected while others are in a financial mess due to student loans hanging on their necks (UNESCO, 2020). Ogunode et al. suggested that this is the time that governments need to rise to the challenges by increasing educational funding, taking care of emotionally and mentally afflicted students, ensuring financial institutions restructure loans in more flexible ways and developing non-traditional ways of learning that will lead to the democratization of access to knowledge.

Covid-19 and Employment and Decent Work for all:

Covid-19 exposes the inequalities in the labor market arising from the resultant changes in the society occasioned by social distancing. This affects individuals hence marginalizing them. A greater number of vulnerable people are experiencing inequalities in accessing decent work which may have taken the form of discrimination. This is not only limited to individuals of low-income backgrounds but also women and people of color in many complex ways (Kantamneni, 2020).

It is the United Nation's aim to encourage and promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all as enunciated in its Sustainability Development goal, (SDG), goal 8 (Roorda et al, 2012), however, the Covid-19 pandemic ravaging the world is distorting this plan. The International Labor Organization, (ILO), estimates that approximately 25million people worldwide could lose their jobs in the Covid-19 induced economic and labor crisis. It is pertinent to note that almost all the economies went into lockdown because of the pandemic, hence economic activities slowed down. Aviation and tourist industries remain the biggest losers. Most economies are already technically in recession, while analysts predict that it would take at least three years for economies to recover fully from the Covid-19 pandemic (ILO, 2020). The continuous stimulus packages by governments aimed to assist individuals, households and enterprises are encouraged as a way out. Therefore it is imperative for authorities to incentivize rules on producing and consuming sustainably with new rules after bailing out enterprises.

Covid-19 and Inequality reduction:

The more vulnerable workers such as the gig (delivery workers) are more exposed to the risks of Covid-19 bringing to fore how the vulnerable socio-economic groups suffer from a greater risk not limited to the risk of financial exposure, greater health risks, worse housing conditions during the lockdown period during Covid-19 thus exacerbating inequalities (Bergamini, 2020; Blundel et al, 2020).

Covid-19 pandemic has succeeded in widening the inequality gap among and within countries for which the United Nations Sustainability Development Goal 10 is poised to address. Be it social, economic, or political inequality, the use of and implementation of the right fiscal, wage, and social protection measures aimed at achieving greater equality is key. However, with this pandemic, the fragility and in some cases the total absence of such policies has been exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. The poor especially in sub-Saharan Africa that is often living in minimum hygienic conditions are affected the most. In countries where there is the existence of refugees seeking asylum, they are stranded thus becoming a risk. There is high constraints against the government's capacity due to increasing debts (Blundell et al, 2020). It is however of note that people working from home continue being paid while those in the informal sectors might not be receiving government benefits since most of them are not registered to social security. This is a challenge to entrepreneurial skills at the SME level. It expected that lending institutions soften their repayment terms by granting moratoriums especially to those who have not been having revenues during the lockdown. In essence, solidarity to people in most need of food and medical supplies is key this period.

Covid-19 and Globalization:

Globalization means so many things to many people, hence its definition can be based on the economic, social, or environmental aspects. It is therefore important we disaggregate the economical definition from the social and other perspective definitions. Hence, globalization can be said to be the process of interaction and integration among the people, industries, companies, and governments of different nations, brought about by investments and trade across borders aided by information technology ((Eatwell, 1995; Bhalla et al, 1999). Globalization, therefore, is an international industrial and financial business structure, with policy and technological developments spurring an increase in cross-border trade, investment, and migration hence making it farther, faster, cheaper, and deeper (The Levin Institute, 2020).

It is important to note that globalization is anchored on policies that open economies both in the domestic and international front. In recent times, many governments have adopted the free-market economic system thus increasing their productivity potentials hence creating new opportunities that aid international trade and investment. In some cases, governments have anchored on bilateral trade agreements to reduce barriers to commerce thus promoting trade in goods, services, and investments. With this, they have built new opportunities for which they are taking advantage of by building foreign factories hence establishing trade, marketing, and production arrangements with their partners usually foreign. Covid-19 generally have disrupted these arrangements by breaking the production and supply chains. It has made it imperative for people to look inwards for alternatives. Globalization is being stifled. In contingency plans during these agreements and arrangements, no one seldom foresaw such a pandemic, hence, there was no provision for such. Globalization has been at the receiving end of the Covid-19 outbreak.

Results & Some General Lessons

The results of the study showed that the Covid-19 pandemic/crisis has left households, companies, and nations in precarious situations. Job losses are on the increase thereby exposing more families to hunger and poverty. Inequality is on the increase as vulnerable people in society are fast being pushed below the poverty line. Globalization is threatened, cross border trades, travels and tourism are on standstill. The health sector has shown signs of understaffing too. In all these, it is obvious that policies in place did not take into account such pandemics and emergencies as Covid-19. From the foregoing Covid-19 impact on SDG with emphasis on goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 10;

- i. Poverty eradication,
- ii. Hunger eradication,
- iii. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages,
- iv. Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning,
- v. Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all,
- vi. Reduce inequality within and among nations (Roorda et al, 2012).

There exist a number of important messages that call for urgent policy actions at all levels as follows:

- i. Covid-19 has no doubt some deleterious effects on both the developed and under-developed, industrialized, and the unindustrialized economies alike. No doubt, globalization generates contagious and second-round effects. These have serious effects on decent works, employment, inequality, health, hunger, and poverty eradication.
- ii. Defective contingency plans can create uncertainty and increase inefficiency and slower response which can further exacerbate the global effects of the global pandemic on globalization and achieving the SDG goals.
- iii. The global economy is on lockdown, there is great job loses, and a worrying productivity gap exists between the nations viz low income and middle-income countries. This transcends poverty increment, increase in inequality, gaps in healthcare, and hunger persistence.

- iv. Reducing economic inequality within and between countries is a defining challenge to SDG 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), thus provoking domestic inequality, a key sustainable development obstacle.

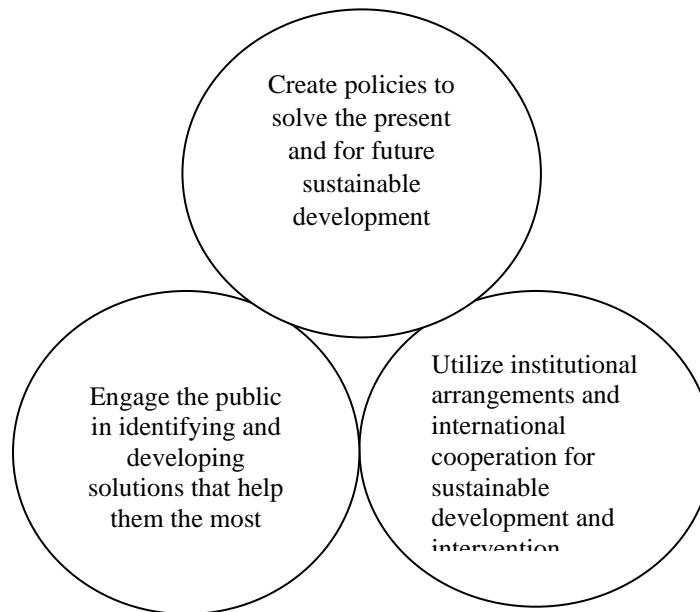


Figure 2: Tripod Solution to Covid-19 Impact on SDG and Globalization- Mitigating Covid-19 Impact on Globalization and SDGs

Concluding Remarks:

Unarguably, the outlook for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Sustainable Development Goals, (SDGs), and Globalization is on the negative with the growing trends across national, regional, and international levels. However, the goals of globalization and SDGs cannot be achieved unless committed efforts are made to address the negative spillover effects of Covid-19 on them. In this regard, the effectiveness of the policy environment matters. For the overarching objectives of SDGs, the policy environment must be incentivized, the various policy actors to discharge their functions within their jurisdiction optimally and maximally including policies that will tackle pandemics in the future. This ensures that no one or sector is left behind. Financial institutions should be encouraged to adopt the option of moratoriums offering customers more flexibility across both secured and unsecured debt, the government should intensify interventions especially for the most vulnerable in the society (Staff, 2020). Covid-19, despite having disrupted our life completely and caused so many deaths worldwide, it has presented an opportunity for policymakers to reassess our relationship with nature, health system, economies with our priorities spelled out. There must be new ways of doing business and living with innovations that will be more inclusive and prosperous culminating in a sustainable and peaceful society (Blundell et al, 2020; Kelly, 2020). Governments should increase budgetary expenditures on education in addition to tax holidays and tax waivers supporting the findings of Prowoto, et al. (2020).

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