



## Coordination and Integration of All Stakeholders to Counter COVID-19

The general impression among the common Pakistanis is that the government needs to provide for all the provisions needed to fight against COVID-19. However, the success in China, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong points to a fundamental fact that efforts of the government alone cannot deal with a pandemic as rampant as COVID-19. No matter how strong or well-equipped a state is, all actors need to contribute within an economy.

So far, in the context of Pakistan combatting the pandemic, we have seen mobilization at various fronts, namely government, certain businesses, tech companies, and communities at the local level<sup>1</sup>. For example, within the industrial sector, there have been efforts for the production of the much-needed ventilators within the automobile-parts manufacturing units and also for protective suits for the paramedical staff within some textile industries. Similarly, all telecommunication companies are working hard to keep Pakistan virtually connected not just for information flow but to keep the economic activity going through virtual means. Further, cellular technology is being used for geotagging of COVID-19 intensity and through the information collected via web-surveys of self-assessment of COVID symptoms<sup>2</sup>.

Hence a lot of good initiatives are coming forth from the industrial sector. Similarly, at the community level, individuals and NGOs can be witnessed making a lot of efforts for the distribution of food. However, effective coordination of the above processes and of the governmental machinery still seem weak at many levels within Pakistan's response to the pandemic. This can be inferred by how at the community level or by big and small businesses, the efforts seem fragmented. Industries that came forward in the context of ventilators production or production of protective gear for the paramedics are still not working at the level of full capacity<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, at the community level, what is being reported on media is either help is not reaching the poor, or there may exist duplication by various governmental and non-governmental efforts that need to be checked<sup>4</sup>.

### Profile of Key Response Requirement for Covid-19 by Different Stakeholders in Pakistan

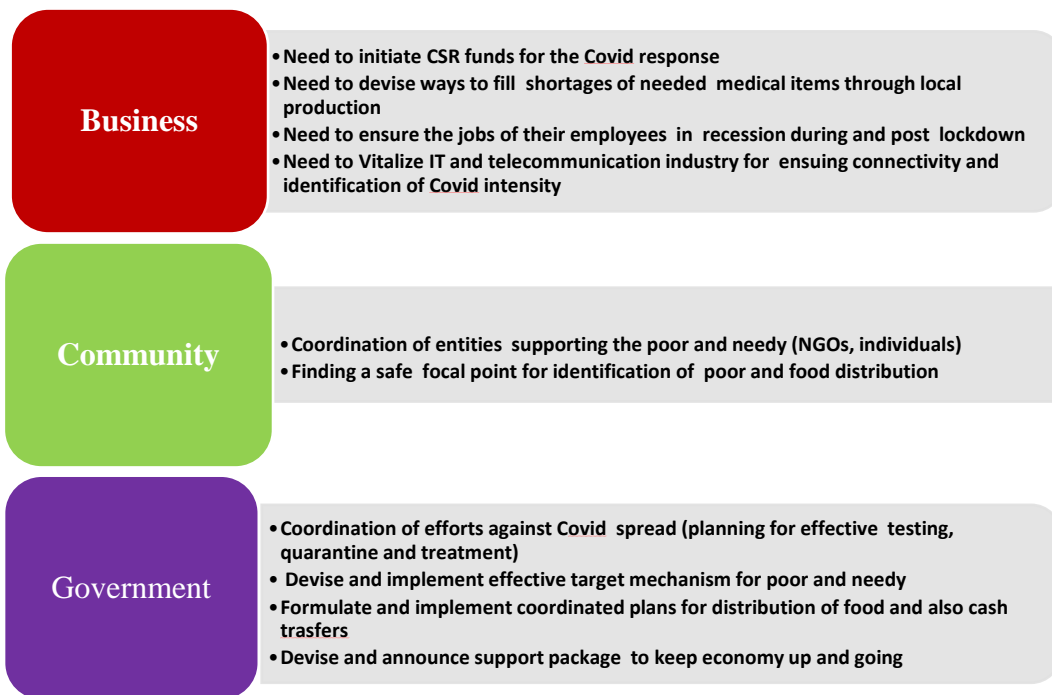
To better manage the efforts for the COVID-19 response by the government and the private sector, the first and foremost need is to have uniform command. Such a centralized operation and that too on war footing may not only create much more uniformity across the federal and provincial governments in their responses but also in the formulation of policies that can incentivize the efforts of the private sector for a long-term basis. The following figure summarizes the action that each player can play.

<sup>1</sup> Upcoming trends for industrial response are inferred from the information given out by experts from different fields at PIDE COVID War online consultative meetings.

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to Taimur Malik's interview for the PIDE COVID War initiative.

<sup>3</sup> As per information by Mr. Shahid Sattar, representative of APTMA at the PIDE online COVID forum, it was found that slow response of the textile industry is primarily because most factories have not been permitted to function initially, given the risk involved for production workers. Further, there are capacity issues as well given the protective gears that need to be produced, require as input not cotton but a man-made fabric that is imported from China.

<sup>4</sup> In Punjab, duplication is being controlled by the government by taking NGOs on board in the process of food distribution to local mosques. But still, the information as to what is happening all over Pakistan in this context is not widely known.



Given the philanthropic efforts of the industrial sector for fulfilling the demand of ventilators and protective suits and masks may reach a limit as the scale of the epidemic increase, hence rethinking in this context is required. The government needs to realize that COVID-19 is a long-term issue, and it is crucial to find sustainable solutions than short fixes. It is vital for the government that policy for commercialization of the products that are being brought forward by different innovators to counter COVID-19 should be taken up for discussion immediately. Further, to mitigate the economic effects of the epidemic, the government needs to find a mechanism of keeping supply chains going of all essential industrial items. In this context, there is an immediate need for the government to work on the following two fronts.

- Government needs to incentivize industries for a change in their production methods that are in line with the safety requirements for workers against COVID-19's risks. Hence, in my opinion, measures for not just hygiene of workers and their health monitoring need to be put in place by law, but production houses need to incorporate the concept of six feet distancing between workers. The need of the hour from the prominent business groups and even small industrialists is just not philanthropy but the re-invention of methods used within production houses.
- Given that the COVID-19 lockdown or slow down surely will have a substantial negative impact on the GDP growth at all levels of economy, government needs to devise a policy to support not just big industries but also small and medium businesses. In this context, Pakistan can learn from Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, which through their timely management, have not only captured and restrained COVID-19 spread but also tackled the economic uncertainty for businesses through the announcement for support at the very beginning.

Hence learning from these three countries, Pakistan must resort to mass-testing for detection and then strategic lockdown as per COVID-19 intensity to keep the economy working. For this, there is a need for a well-coordinated and uniform governmental response at all levels along with the formulation and announcement of informed policy packages for support to businesses all big and small<sup>5</sup>. This measure may help in reducing economic uncertainty and a plausible economic collapse post lockdown for Pakistan.

<sup>5</sup> In Singapore, these packages have been made as per the expected degree of economic losses from COVID, with more support given to sectors that were expected to be impacted.

The challenges facing Pakistan are immense and in wide-ranging dimensions. The big puzzles for the government are not just how to fight the disease and its adverse economic effect in the face of slowing of the economy but how to prevent civil unrest that may arise from food shortages. I believe that to avoid all these dimensions, the government's prime role is of coordinator. It cannot cover an epidemic such as COVID-19 on its own and need the integrated support of all other essential pillars of the economy that is the private sector and its citizens through their positive engagements.

Seen from the angle of past epidemics in history, it is found that outbreaks similar to the COVID-19 do have an ability to create economic distress to the extent that can lead to conflict (Evans, R. J., 1998). To revisit a few such examples is the case of unrest that came about in Haiti post-AIDS outbreak in 1982, which had led to a tremendous decline in personal incomes as tourism dried up with the epidemic (Black, D., 1986). Not only that, historians show that many ancient societies such as those of Inca and Aztecs were wiped entirely not from wars but by diseases (Diamond, J. (1997).

Hence, epidemics can abruptly dismantle a system or a society. Most of the time, such transitions are caused by how economic interests evolve as demographics change post an epidemic as was witnessed in the case of the great plague (named as the era of Black Death). Economic historians credit the fall of feudalism and the rise of capitalism in medieval Europe to be rooted in how the plague had changed the demographic dynamics with a significant negative impact on the feudalistic hold of the elites.

The private sector, especially the big industrial groups and elites, need to fight this hand in hand with the government not just on humanitarian grounds but for their own economic survival too. If the disease spreads widely, causing massive loss of human lives and food shortages, it can dismantle the whole structure of our economy. This is what history tells us and it would be wise to learn from it.

**Reference:**

Black, D. (1986). *The plague years: a chronicle of AIDS, the epidemic of our times*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

[Diamond, J. \(1997\), \*Guns, Germs and Steel\*](#), New York: W. W. Norton.

Evans, R. (1988). Epidemics and Revolutions: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Europe. *Past & Present*, (120), 123-146.

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