

Vaccines with a global common good guarantee



The post COVID19 world has to be one that shares the antiviral therapeutics and the vaccines with the poor

We are in the grip of a historic pandemic; the novel corona virus, which causes COVID19, is threatening the whole of the human family. COVID19 does not discriminate. Across the globe, outbreaks of COVID19 continue to claim thousands of lives.

Measures with huge costs

So far, we have exercised whatever tried and effective methods we have available to human society against the ravages of the infectious disease: quarantines, lockdowns, hygiene measures and social distancing — all a luxury for some, depending on the circumstances. While effective, the economic, emotional and societal costs of trying to stop the virus through lockdowns and social distancing are enormous and unprecedented. Countries are hemorrhaging cash in efforts to ease the economic standstill created by COVID19. And as the costs rise, the patience of their populations is waning from fear, uncertainty, and economic collapse.

The remedy for all: a vaccine as a global common good. Although vaccine development for COVID19 is proceeding at historic speed, we do not have an effective option as yet. Remarkably and what is encouraging, there are many promising candidates already, several of which are entering the essential phase3 clinical trials. Keeping the hope of the world alive, companies are willing to risk pre financing production, and governments in turn are already committing billions of dollars towards the purchase of the vaccine/ s in anticipation of its/their availability.

Right behind the race for the vaccine is the other race — the one to develop proven therapeutics (medicines) that can ease the burden on those struck by COVID19. These too will find their way to the market, and the global buy up will begin again.



What an effective vaccine is

Being more cost effective than medicine, vaccines provide a method of prevention. They offer protection from infection in the first place, disrupting chains of transmission and saving individuals from days of illness, hospitalization or death, possible even in the face of excellent care. An effective vaccine is part of a more lasting solution. The allure of that security is immense. It means buying not only health but also enabling economic recovery and freedom itself in many

ways. But an effective vaccine cannot be truly effective and humane until all communities are reached without discrimination.

Herein lies the tension. What will the post COVID19 world look like? A rich world that is protected, locking out the vast and potentially infectious populations of the poor countries? Or will it be one that shares the therapeutics and the vaccines with the poor?

History has shown us how to eradicate diseases for the global good of our own countries — but also for all. The successful eradication of major diseases such as smallpox or polio required a global effort and the availability of vaccines to all who needed it anywhere in the world. When Dr. Jonas Salk came up with a polio vaccine that was approved for the general population to use, he refused to patent it. When asked who owns the patent, his answer was this. “Well, the people, I would say,” he told journalist Edward R. Murrow in 1955. “There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?”

We need this sort of leadership — a leadership which will guide us away from incredible profits to humanity’s survival, and lay stress on the need for the open source production of vaccine without any commercial ownership of any COVID19 vaccine.

A message for the rich

For the rich world, we would say that this proposed act of human solidarity, to ensure that medicines and vaccines get to the whole human family simultaneously, is really in their own self interest; not just an act of charity. Surely, nobody will want the virus persisting in many parts of the poor world ready to re-infect the rich world and create new surges where it was under the pleasant thought that the rich had protected themselves from the pandemic. Compared to the cost of the trillions that have gone in the stimulus packages, that is a minuscule cost. The positive news is that we are confronted with clear and simple action that comes at an eminently affordable cost that would save hundreds of thousands of lives, if not millions of future lives. And that is in the self interest of everyone, especially the rich world.

Already, many Nobel Laureates and global personalities have signed on to an Appeal to Declare the COVID 19 Vaccines as a Global Common Good ([https:// bit.ly/3iPo8Sz](https://bit.ly/3iPo8Sz) and [https:// bit.ly/3lAQEc6](https://bit.ly/3lAQEc6)). We now urge all the countries of the world to unite to pass a resolution at the United Nations to make novel corona virus vaccines as a product without any commercial ownership to turn this collective wish into reality.

This must be done soon.

*Muhammad Yunus and José Ramos-Horta
are Nobel Peace Laureates*