

Corona Challenges the Idea of Development

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Several media reports are referring to current situation as a war in which the human race is fighting against the novel COVID-19. For me, there cannot be a war against nature as it is a far more inclusive and a greater phenomenon of which the human race forms just the 1/nth part. Defining the situation as a war prioritizes fighting it only from the front rather than focusing on better preparedness during normal times. Such 'fighting from the front policies' - usually comprising of only relief and response-based strategies, are restricted only to the health and medical related aspects. It completely ignores the cascading effects it has on the socio-economic, environmental, psycho-social and governance related dimensions. The current COVID-19 emergency challenges the very idea of development. The healthcare infrastructure even in the most developed countries, at present, is struggling to respond to the emerging needs of people. One can only imagine the stress on the health workers serving the patients in a country like ours with 1.3 billion population and only 0.8 doctors and 0.7 hospital beds per 1,000 persons.



Corona has affected each one of us, although, differently. Pic Courtesy: needpix.com

The situation, undoubtedly, is unprecedented. My father who works in the Indian Security Press - one of the most important financial institutes in India, shared that this is the first time ever that the company has stopped operating since its establishment. Many people are experiencing similar situation for the first time – the complete lockdown, shutting down of industries, factories, companies, discontinuation of flights, trains and every form of public and personal transport. Every sector, including the unorganized sector is suffering losses due to this pandemic. Even though the cause is same, the impact is different for each one of us.

The uncertainties are having a major impact not just on the economy but on people at individual and at collective level. My uncle, a self-taught photographer, offers his services for wedding shoots in Maharashtra and has earned expertise in this field over time. Even in normal times, wedding photography is considered a seasonal employment here where most of the nuptials happen between March and June but this year the whole business has been killed due to lockdown. The future, at least for this year, is grim for him and his family. One can only imagine the plight of migrant workers. The economic, social and psychosocial impact is immense on different sections of the population.

Looking around, and with a bit of introspection, I do consider myself privileged. There are thousands of people struggling to return to their homes - some in search of shelter, some for food and some for other essentials in order to survive this emergency. The question is why does everybody want to go back home? Is it really about moving away from threat/ problem or is it also about searching safety and security? It is about time that we look for answers by tracing the large-scale migration from underdeveloped rural regions of the country to its ill-developed urban areas. Only then we, as a society, will be better prepared to respond to such situations in future.