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Multilateralism- A Panacea for Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

We live in an enigma where global challenges are forthcoming now and then, but the response of the world remains splintered. One such global challenge is the COVID-19 pandemic. Since World War II, the foundations of multilateral institutions had begun. With time, these institutions, with the help of collective multilateral approach, defeated social, economic and health challenges. However, this pandemic gave us a clear picture of why we need a more coordinated approach to fight this novel coronavirus. The egalitarian and bilateral approach towards a global issue may not deem fit to be an adequate response. Ultimately multilateralism is the only panacea for COVID-19.

This paper will enlighten the issues with the ongoing multilateral approach and will also focus on the challenges faced by the states in this pandemic. This paper will also throw light on the flaring tensions in this phase of the global health crisis. It will also address how multilateral institutions are collectively working for the people and will also provide a solution for more inclusive multilateralism.

I. INTRODUCTION

According Multilateralism is a rule-based process of collective decision and association of states for mutual guarantees. In this global pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) is leading the world cooperation with efforts to determine, avert and acknowledge the COVID-19. The geopolitical situations have worsened the orthodox multilateral policy issues. Multilateralism allows developing states to connect better to the global economy. It is inclusive of international dialogue that can produce effective solutions.

In multilateral diplomacy, each state member would not prioritize the international interest and restrain to its national interest. Multilateralism does not depend upon the actions of one state. International and national interest may not always be compatible, and how to achieve both is the crux of multilateralism. Countries compete for the identification of ideas and principles to formulate practical and realistic rules regarding them. Multilateralism is a double-edged sword. There have been issues of burden-sharing and power-sharing in global cooperation.

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We live in a paradox where global challenges are more connected, but the response of society remains fragmented. Multilateralism is needed more than ever in this situation of the pandemic. In the lack of multilateralism, there is a growth of populist and nationalist voice. Disengagement of the world superpowers leads to threatening the core of multilateralism. However, France and Germany, both are the classic example of multilateralism. They allied with multi-government by adaptation. International relations is an advanced praxis for the collaboration of ideas and interests.

Multilateralism has averted major global wars and managed cold wars, and collective security and peace have always been the founding principles of multilateralism. It addresses not only geopolitical and non-political issues but also global economic and health crisis. Nevertheless, there is a room for development by insights of problematic issues. The current pandemic COVID-19 has proved that in today's hyper-connected world, why multilateralism is crucial.

II. INSIGHTS ON MULTILATERALISM

Multilateralism is the process of organizing relations between groups of three or more states. Beyond that fundamental quantitative aspect, multilateralism is to comprise certain qualitative elements or principles that shape the character of the arrangement or institution.²

According to Keohane, multilateralism is 'the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions'. It thus involves states exclusively and often not exclusively institutions, defined as 'persistent and connected sets of rules, formal and informal, that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations'.³ In simple words, where three or more countries work together for the betterment of an idea and its development, it is called multilateralism. Multilateralism requires to impose restrictions with global diplomacy to reach to an agreement. Multilateral institutions, by no means, supersede states as the most important actors in world politics. On the contrary, they are created by states, and states dominate their decision-making.⁴ Multilateralism creates international standard and also has an efficiency advantage.

The first significant outbreak of multilateralism was after World War- II when the United Nations came into existence in the year 1945. Multilateralism is the exon of the United

²ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, (May 22nd 2020, 06.23am) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/multilateralism>.

³ Keohane, R.O. 'Multilateralism: an Agenda for Research', International Journal, 45: 731- 764, 1990.

⁴ Keohane RO, *The Contingent Legitimacy of Multilateralism*, GARNET WORKING PAPER: NO: 09/06, (May 22nd 2020, 07.29 am) <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/csgr/garnet/workingpapers/0906.pdf>.

Nations. Over these significant years, there have been global challenges such as climate change, poverty, migration, pandemics, terrorism, illiteracy, and human rights violations. These challenges always call for collective and responsible action from the states. Multilateralism is the key to global prosperity and sustainability. It is the organizing principle of global diplomacy and governance. There have been issues with the working of the United Nations such as its constitution and decision-making capabilities, shortage of staffing and personnel's, its financial hazards, lack of coordination and politicization by the superpower countries. There is a division between the notions of people and the responses of institutions and policies. Hence it creates apprehension in national and international systems and institutions. This ambiguity, this fear of the future can be seen in the booming voices that promote extreme nationalism and isolationism.

Nevertheless, multilateralism is not a threat to sovereignty. On the contrary, it strengthens it. The Stockholm Convention on Human Environment, Sustainable Development Goals, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paris Agreement, WTO, GATT, European Union, The G groups, etc. all are the outcome of positive multilateralism.

III. COVID-19- A BRIEF SUMMARY-

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. It was reported by the Wuhan Municipal Health Organization in Hubei.⁵

Later, WHO set up an IMST team for this outbreak in China. It also reported on social media about this virus. On January 12 2020, China officially declared the genetic sequence of the COVID- 19 viruses. In mid-January, the first case of this virus was reported outside China, in Thailand. Studies showed that there was evidence of human to human transfer through contact. It was declared a global health emergency and pandemic by the World Health Organization. Later it also released Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan to help with the weak health system.

⁵ *Q&A on coronaviruses (COVID-19)*, WHO, (May 22nd 2020, 09.56 am) <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>.

As of May 22, 2020, 216 countries are suffering from this global pandemic. 5061476 positive cases and 331475 casualties have been reported so far.

IV. CHALLENGES IN THE PANDEMIC

The Health and Prevention Challenge-

In this global pandemic, there is a need for public health strategy. Most of the states have failed to provide primary health amenities to its people. No single country is spared from COVID-19. Both developed and developing countries are affected; the virus does not differentiate between rich and poor, urban and rural population. Issues such as lack of awareness, lack of potable drinking water, nutritional food, ill-equipped public health centre and hospital are prevailing in this pandemic.⁶

There is currently a shortfall in health facilities: 18% at the Sub-Centre level, 22% at the PHC level and 30% at the CHC level (as of March 2018).⁷ There is also a shortage in the clinical settings throughout such as plastic gloves, PPE kits, hand sanitizers, surgical masks, medical equipment and devices, ventilators, ICU, ECMO, hospital beds. The health care services and systems in India as compared to other countries are still developing and have challenges of workforce shortages, absenteeism, inadequate infrastructure and quality of care.⁸ The health care system is not adequate or prepared to contain COVID19 transmission in the rural areas, especially in many north Indian states because of the shortage of doctors, hospital beds and equipment, especially in the densely populated underserved state.⁹

Till now, no specific treatment for the viral infection has been made. Clinical trials are going on in different parts of the world, yet still, no antiviral agent has been developed. Different research groups are utilizing the possibility of using measles vaccine as the cure for COVID-19. It may take several months for trial and development. One major challenge in the pandemic is the shortage of rapid diagnosis tests. Its availability would lead to a quick response in this outbreak. The possibility of having these kits should not be called idealistic, but a necessity. The distribution of scarce resources has also been a challenge in this

⁶ Mitra S, *The implications of COVID-19 for rural India*. IDR, (May 22nd 2020, 04.03pm) <https://idronline.org/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-rural-india/>.

⁷ *Bulletin on Rural Health Statistics in India*, STATISTICS DIVISION, MINISTRY OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE (May 22nd 04.58 pm) https://data.gov.in/catalog/rural-health-statistics-2018?filters%5Bfield_catalog_reference%5D=6680151&format=json&offset=0&limit=6&sort%5Bcreated%5D=desc.

⁸ *Health Management Information System*, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, (May 22nd 2020, 06.23 pm) <https://nrhm-mis.nic.in/Pages/RHS2019.aspx?RootFolder=%2FRURAL%20HEALTH%20STATISTICS%2F%28A%29%20RH%20-%202019&FolderCTID=0x01200057278FD1EC909F429B03E86C7A7C3F31&View={473F70C6-7A85-47C5-AB5C-B2AD255F29B2}>.

⁹ Mitra, Supra note 6.

pandemic. This scarcity has led to a compromise on the life of health and government workers who are openly exposed to this pandemic. The steps taken by the states in the prevention of COVID-19 are failing miserably. The national lockdown, social distancing, sanitizing, all these prevention steps have not worked as it was expected.

The Financial and Economic Challenge-

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an unprecedented economic crisis. Since its first outbreak in Wuhan, China, the Chinese markets collapsed due to the nation-wide lockdown. After the WHO declared this novel coronavirus as global health pandemic, majority of the countries have shut down their markets for preventing the spread of the virus. It has triggered the economic downturn globally. The price risk asset has gone down gradually. The market volatility has escalated, resulting in the decline of liquidity worldwide.¹⁰ This pandemic may expose financial vulnerability. The credit market is shrinking, and due to this risk asset price has gained a lot. Emerging and frontier market economies are facing the perfect storm. They have experienced the sharpest reversal in portfolio flows on record, both in dollar terms and as a share of emerging and frontier market GDP. This loss of external debt financing is likely to put pressure on more leveraged and less creditworthy borrowers. This may lead to a rise in debt restructurings, which could test existing debt resolution frameworks.¹¹

In this global crisis, the resilience of the banks is tested throughout. There is a need for a new and globally adaptable fiscal, monetary and financial policy that can improve the domestic market and also promote multilateralism. Due to this crisis, there is a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Under the assumption that the pandemic and required containment peaks in the second quarter for most countries in the world, and recedes in the second half of this year, it is projected that global growth in 2020 to fall to -3 per cent. This is a downgrade of 6.3 percentage points from January 2020, a significant revision over a brief period. This makes the Great Lockdown the worst recession since the Great Depression, and far worse than the Global Financial Crisis.¹²

There is severe price inflation of virus combating items due to the non-availability of those items and also because of the increasing demand. There is a delay in the procurement

¹⁰ Tobias Adrian, *COVID-19 Crisis Poses Threat to Financial Stability*, IMF, (May 22nd 2020, 08.22 pm) <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/covid-19-crisis-poses-threat-to-financial-stability>.

¹¹ *Global Financial Stability Report*, IMF, (May 22nd 2020, 10.11 pm) <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/GFSR/Issues/2020/04/14/global-financial-stability-report-april-2020>.

¹² Gita Gopinath, *The Great Lockdown: Worst Economic Downturn Since the Great Depression*, IMF, (May 23rd 12.04 am) <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression/>.

process.¹³ Merchandise trade to plunge to 13-30% in 2020. Services trade may be the component of world trade most directly affected by COVID-19 through the imposition of transport and travel restrictions and the closure of many retail and hospitality establishments. Unlike goods, there are no inventories of services to be drawn down today and restocked at a later stage. As a result, declines in services trade during the pandemic may be lost forever.¹⁴ World's leading economies such as the US, China, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and many others are at the verge of collapse. Besides, Stock Markets around the world have been pounded, and oil prices have fallen off a cliff.¹⁵ One major challenge for the multilateral institutions is that a balance between those countries who advocate allegiance and those who argue for a coordinated international response needs to be formulated.

The Information Challenge-

Due to the continuing lockdown and the pandemic, a continuous disruption has been caused by information and technology. There is a massive escalation in the internet traffic due to the increase in online services such as online shopping, robot delivery, digital and contactless payments, distance learning, telecommunication, online games and communication sector. Streaming and OTT platforms have also seen a significant rise in their traffic. The global bandwidth demand is a test of the internet itself, and it is a cause for trouble for high-tech companies offering remote conferencing services, video streaming providers, online gaming.¹⁶

The colossal traffic has led to a decline in the speed of the internet all over the world. Major online platforms such as YouTube, Prime videos have shifted their video quality to the standard definition from high definition. Apps such as Zoom has received a negative response from its user due to the privacy and security concern. The social media traffic is also on the hike, resulting in the spreading of misinformation and fake news like wildfire. The chaos caused by pandemic has allowed hackers for data leak and theft.

¹³ Vinay Sharma, *COVID-19 Challenges and Response: How procurement underpins the World Bank's response to the pandemic*, WORLD BANK, (May 23rd 2020, 12.34 am) <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/covid-19-challenges-and-response-how-procurement-underpins-world-banks-response-pandemic>.

¹⁴ *Trade set to plunge as COVID-19 pandemic upends global economy*, WTO, (May 23rd 2020, 08.13 am) https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pres20_e/pr855_e.htm.

¹⁵ Ifran mahar, *Impact of Covid-19 on Global Economy Structure*, MODERN DIPLOMACY, (May 23rd 2020, 08.45 am) <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2020/04/22/impact-of-covid-19-on-global-economy-structure/>.

¹⁶ *The tech challenges brought by COVID-19*, PANDA, (May 23rd 2020, 10.24 am) <https://www.pandasecurity.com/mediacenter/mobile-news/covid-19-tech-challenges/>.

V. FLARING TENSIONS IN THE PANDEMIC-

The current pandemic has not only brought global slowdown but has also started to flare tensions among the states. The member states of the UN have constrained the manifestation of the United Nations principle of equality and maintain international peace and harmony. The role of the multilateral institutions is now under scrutiny by the member states, starting from the WHO to WTO to World Bank. The real power of the UN lies with its veto members, the United States, Great Britain, France, China and Russia. Those who were strongholds of multilateralism argued that increase in economic integration would lead to a tremendous multilateral relation. However, the ties of interdependence led to a nationalistic gain in the voices of the states. Since the outbreak of a pandemic, the role and credibility of multilateral institutions are in question.

American President Donald Trump has lurched into his latest phase of bashing concerted, multinational efforts, which he derides as "globalism." Despite a global pandemic, Trump has adopted the World Health Organization as his new favourite punching bag. He has cut down the funding of WHO from the United States. This situation seems to be a threat to globalism and international diplomacy.¹⁷ Tensions between China and India are flaring up again as both countries try and establish their dominance in the Galwan Valley region. Both countries have reinforced troop deployment along the disputed border in eastern Ladakh.¹⁸ In the pandemic, tensions between the arch-foes flared in Iraq where the United States deployed Patriot air defence missiles, prompting neighbouring Iran to warn of consequences and demand a US withdrawal. Both countries have been walloped by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed more than 99,000 lives in the United States and more than 7450 in Iran.¹⁹

There has been a misuse of rules in the pandemic by China. China has an unfair trade advantage over other countries. China is likely to use the crisis as an opportunity to raise its profile and expand its influence, particularly over countries hard-hit by the pandemic. The pandemic is, therefore, likely to accelerate the rebalancing of global economic power from the West to the East in the coming years. Due to this, reliability of the WTO as a multilateral

¹⁷ The Editors, *Will Trump's War on 'Globalism' Spell the End of Multilateralism?*, WPR, (May 23rd 2020, 12.34 pm) <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/insights/27914/in-attacking-globalism-trump-is-weakening-multilateralism>.

¹⁸ Prabhjote Gill, *Amidst a pandemic, both China and India have reportedly deployed troops in Ladakh as tensions flare up along the border*, BUSINESS INSIDER, (May 23rd 2020, 02.23 pm) [https://www.businessinsider.in/defense/news/amidst-covid19-pandemic-china-and-india-deploy-troops-in-ladakh-](https://www.businessinsider.in/defense/news/amidst-covid19-pandemic-china-and-india-deploy-troops-in-ladakh-border/articleshow/75818433.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cpps)

¹⁹ Agens France, *US heat up war of words despite coronavirus pandemic*, HINDUSTAN TIMES, (May 23rd 2020, 09.23 pm) <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/iran-us-heat-up-war-of-words-despite-coronavirus-pandemic/story-QqNmXReQJUEyGX9x9BkPuN.html>.

agency is in question as there is a paralysis in the principles of trading- negotiations, dispute settlement and transparency.²⁰

VI. MULTILATERALISM AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION- REMEDY FOR COVID-19

According to the UN75 initiative led by the United Nations, April 24 is celebrated as International day of Multilateralism. The best reason why we need multilateralism is to recover the gain made in the pandemic. Multilateralism is helping in the boost of scientific collaboration and it also in reducing the widening inequalities in the field of information and technology. The world community needs to adapt to the growing technological era for the betterment of society. States need to commit to global development in this pandemic. They should work together for health, labour and financial dimensions. Unity in states will lead to the strengthening of international cooperation and solidarity. Multilateralism needs more inclusiveness from its member countries. A viable recovery plan is sought once this pandemic is over. The importance of preserving freedoms and individual rights, ensuring equitable access to food, medicine and reliable telecommunications for the most vulnerable (including refugees and informal workers), and the need to for the response to the pandemic also addresses growing inequalities and climate change.²¹

The rise in the populist and unilateral voices have threatened multilateralism. Trump's policy to make 'America great again' is a sheer example of how superpower countries have threatened multilateralism. America has a significant role in the foundations of multilateral institutions. Its exclusion in the multilateralism by opting out of the WHO has weakened the thread of international cooperation. Disengagement of a state is a severe menace to multilateralism. These are all threats to international peace and security: coronavirus, conflict, displacement, detention, disease, domestic violence, famine, rampant unemployment, increasing rates of homelessness and poverty—all of these make our world less secure, more vulnerable to the myths of militarism, to xenophobia, hate, and violence. To build a world of peace and security, we need equity, justice, and solidarity. We need international cooperation and multilateral action.²²

There is a need for strategic development. Commitment to multilateralism in the only hope

²⁰ Weizhen Tan, *As US-China rivalry heightens, the pandemic could tilt global power in Beijing's favour*, CNBC, (May 23rd 2020, 08.23 pm) <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/08/coronavirus-us-china-tensions-increase-beijing-seeks-more-influence.html>.

²¹ *Virtual dialogue on "Multilateralism in the time of COVID-19"*, UN, (May 23rd 2020, 11.22 pm) <https://www.un.int/news/virtual-dialogue-multilateralism-time-covid-19>.

²² Ray Acheson, *COVID-19: Multilateralism Matters*, WILPF, (May 24th 2020, 12.34 am) <https://www.wilpf.org/covid-19-multilateralism-matters/>.

left to win this pandemic. The decayed WTO, impoverished WHO and unaccountable UN have made it clear why need to reform multilateralism. On the other hand, China's attempt to mask diplomacy with fabricated information and the delayed response has put the entire world in danger. The failure of multilateralism is starkly signified in the Chinese establishment's failure to provide information at an early stage to the World Health Organization (WHO) and other countries about the evolving situation in Hubei province, even though the first case is supposed to have emerged there back in November 2019.²³

The multilateral institutions such as OECD and WTO are working hand in hand to boost the confidence in trade and global market by accountability and transparency. Global supply chains should be intact. The trade barrier of all the essential food and medical supplements should be removed. Millions of people have lost their job. Thus they are to be provided with job security. These institutions should enable the free flow of data for a collective response. Mutual reinforcement is the key to remedy this pandemic. The countries should avoid escalations in the trade tensions. Principles of non-discrimination and disciplined export restitution should be followed by all the participating countries of the world.²⁴

The global impact of pandemics, however, reveals the responsibility of the international community to redefine the understanding of health policy from a global perspective.²⁵

A large scale sub-national, national and international response is required. Formulation of joint policy rather than unilateral policy is to be given due importance. The only way of doing this is through multilateral agencies that come together and commit to the science, but also commit to the equitable distribution of the benefits.²⁶ Financial regulation and individual supervision are needed in developing countries. Growth of cross border telemedicine must be increased. Vital support to foreign entry in health-related services should be given on priority. The overall capacity should boost by international coordination and digital connectivity.

Over the next 15 months, the World Bank Group will be providing up to \$160 billion in financing tailored to the health, economic and social shocks countries are facing,

²³ Dhanasree Jayaram, *Opinion – Can the Coronavirus Crisis Revive Multilateralism?*, E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (May 24th 2020, 02.12 am) <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/03/26/opinion-can-the-coronavirus-crisis-revive-multilateralism/>.

²⁴ *COVID-19 and international trade: Issues and actions*, OECD, (May 24th 2020, 03.13 am) <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-and-international-trade-issues-and-actions-494da2fa/>.

²⁵ Gisela Hirschmann, *Opinion – Coronavirus: A Global Crisis Waiting for a Global Response*, E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, (May 24th 2020, 09.23 am) <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/04/02/opinion-coronavirus-a-global-crisis-waiting-for-a-global-response/>.

²⁶ Jeremy Farrar, *The only way to beat the crisis is if we come together and commit to science*, OECD, (May 24th 11.18 am) <https://www.oecd-forum.org/users/397729-jeremy-farrar/posts/the-only-way-to-beat-the-covid-19-crisis-is-if-we-come-together-and-commit-to-science-8fa5b048-ee2c-4bf7-9ed4-29c1a2639932>.

including over \$50 billions of IDA resources on grant and highly concessional terms.²⁷ One hundred countries will also get support from the World Bank to strengthen, monitor, and prevent low-income countries who are in fragile condition. Eighty countries and customs territories have banned or limited the export of face masks, protective gear, gloves, and other goods to mitigate shortages since the coronavirus outbreak began.²⁸ The WTO has taken collective measures to ensure the free flow of these supplements in this pandemic.

The need for reform in multilateralism is required in this pandemic. The attitude of the parties involved in this crisis must be positive. They should have a genuine interest in sustainable goals. The participating countries should have the ability to compromise a situation. Moreover, they should practise solidarity by binding commitment. Transparency and free flow of information should be the principle of new multilateralism. Furthermore, country-specific trade policy and regular monitoring of the situation should be done.

The multilateral institutions and multilateral trade have played a vital role in this pandemic.

Trade and investment ministers of the G-20 group have agreed to ensure fair trade and a continued flow of vital medicines as well as other essential goods to tackle Covid-19 pandemic.²⁹ Despite extreme PPE supply shortages in the initial stages of the outbreak, UNICEF has met the demand for PPE products for April to June, managed to secure availability from suppliers for critical products, such as 33 million surgical masks, 21.0 million respirators, 4.2 million coveralls, 5.7 million surgical gowns, 1.6 million goggles, 12,000 infrared thermometers and 31.5 million face shields.³⁰

Germany, the US and Switzerland have supplied 35% of the medical products to the world. China, Germany and the US have exported 40% of the total PPE demand. India has supplied medicines to various parts of the globes. Import and export of medical essentials have crossed \$2 trillion. The Intra-European Union trade is 5% of the total world merchandise trade. The trade of critical product has crossed \$597 billion, which constitutes to 1.7% of the world trade. The tariff of essential products has escalated, and a rise in protective supply tariff has

²⁷ *How the World Bank Group is helping countries with COVID-19 (coronavirus)*, WORLD BANK, (May 24th 2020, 12.44pm), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2020/02/11/how-the-world-bank-group-is-helping-countries-with-covid-19-coronavirus>.

²⁸ *80 countries are hoarding medical supplies – here's why it damages the global response to COVID-19*, WEF, (May 24th 2020, 04.45 pm) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/wto-report-80-countries-limiting-exports-medical-supplies/>.

²⁹ *Covid-19: G20 trade ministers agree to ensure uninterrupted flow of vital medical supplies*, THE ECONOMIC TIMES, (May 24th 2020 11.23 pm) https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/covid-19-g20-trade-ministers-agree-to-ensure-uninterrupted-flow-of-vital-medical-supplies/articleshow/74907912.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cpst.

³⁰ *COVID-19 impact assessment on supplies and logistics sourced by UNICEF Supply Division*, UNICEF, (May 24th 2020, 11.12 pm) <https://www.unicef.org/supply/stories/covid-19-impact-assessment-supplies-and-logistics-sourced-unicef-supply-division>

ascended between 11.5%-21%.³¹ The role of WTO is crucial in these escalations, and it has laid foundations to the execution of Pharma Agreement and expansion of the Information Technology Agreement.

The World Health Organization has supplied 145 million surgical masks, 50 million N-95 masks, 26 million gloves, 4 million gowns, 3 million goggles, and 10 million face shield in the fight to COVID-19. Further, it has also supplied 1.5 million test kits to 129 counties, and an advance order of 30 million kits have been placed. It is also providing global information on risk and preparedness for the pandemic. Not only this, under the aegis of WHO, 100 countries have also started a solidarity trial of effective COVID vaccine. PPE, diagnostic and clinical consortium have been formed to address the shortage of essential medical supplies.

Lastly, a need for a global agreement has arisen for tackling this pandemic. A Global Agreement on Medical Equipment and Supplies (GAMES) can make the current fall in tariffs of medical goods permanent and serve as a stepping stone to ensure that foreign and national producers of medical products are treated equally.³²

VII. CONCLUSION

The old rule book of multilateralism needs to have pragmatic reforms, which may escalate the pressure on international bodies. There has been continuous development in the field of multilateralism since World War II, but now with time, laws and principles are obsolete. The systems and principles dealt with unilateral and bilateral issues should be replaced by multilateralism. There should be enforcement of standard rules by the global parties. This is the beginning of the cognitive revolution. The pandemic has brought many opportunities to reform our old multilateral system and develop good cooperation in the world. Paralysis in the UN has led to tensions, which maybe sort out soon to enjoy the very principle of cooperation and solidarity.

A principled and practical multilateral system offers a unique platform to tackle global and local challenges that appear to grow in scale and complexity, including protracted humanitarian crises, widening inequality, and the increasing frequency and intensity of climate change-induced disasters.³³ The UN should adhere to the doctrine of responsibility to protect. Lastly, a rule-based inclusive multilateral system should be promoted to regain the

³¹ *WTO ISSUES NEW REPORT ON WORLDWIDE TRADE IN COVID-19 MEDICAL PRODUCTS*, WTO, (MAY 25TH 2020, 07.23 AM) [HTTPS://WWW.WTO.ORG/ENGLISH/NEWS_E/NEWS20_E/RESE_03APR20_E.HTM#FNT-1](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news20_e/rese_03apr20_e.htm#fnt-1).

³² *OSCAR GUINEA, A GLOBAL AGREEMENT ON MEDICAL EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES TO FIGHT COVID-19*, ECIPE, (MAY 25TH 2020, 10.23 AM) [HTTPS://ECIPE.ORG/BLOG/GLOBAL-AGREEMENT-MEDICAL-SUPPLIES/](https://ecipe.org/blog/global-agreement-medical-supplies/)

³³ **Ulrika Mod er**, *The future of multilateralism*, UNDP, (May 25th 2020, 02.34pm) <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2019/the-future-of-multilateralism.html>

trust of the countries by the multilateral institutions.
