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Covid-19 And Collective Action

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This article is based on **“The deep void in global leadership”** which was published in The Hindu on 30/03/2020. It talks about the lack of global collective action in combating Covid-19.

Within a few months of inception of **Covid-19**, the virus has affected almost all the countries around the world killing thousands of people. It has caused and will continue to cause severe damages to the global economy.

Moreover, this millennium has already **suffered three pandemics** (Namely Swine Flu in 2009, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)) and Covid-19 may not be the last. Yet, the global community has failed to develop a comprehensive, concerted plan of action, to combat this terror.

The G20 leaders have agreed to **inject \$5-trillion into the world economy** to partially counter the **devastating economic impact of the pandemic**, but a global war against the virus will require much more global collective efforts.

This is because, as long as the virus is alive in some corner of the world, it can strike back and turn into a pandemic again. Further, national shutdowns have saved lives from the assault of Covid-19, but it poses the risk of losing lives to starvation and malnutrition, somewhere in the world if adequate steps were not taken.

However, global collective action has been until now remained inadequate.

Reasons for the Lack of Inadequate Collective Actions

Two developments in the global polity in the last few years have contributed to the indifference towards collective global action.

- **Rise of Protectionism :**
 - This ideology propounds that **'global good' is in conflict with and inimical to national interests.**
 - For example, in accordance with America First policy, U.S. President Trump, in June 2017, that the U.S. will cease involvement from the **Paris Accord on climate change**, on the ground that the accord will 'undermine U.S. economic interest'.
 - Similarly, **climate change negotiation at COP-25** hasn't resulted in anything and failed talks on the **WTO Doha round negotiations.**
- **Decline of Multilateral Institutions:**
 - The United Nations (the outcome of the shared vision of the world leaders after World War II, that collective action is the only way forward to prevent the occurrence of another war) has been criticised, for not living up to its expectations to maintain peace among nations in the nearly 80 years since its formation. For example, **the Syrian Crisis.**
 - Also, the UN's affiliate organisations have few drawbacks in their functioning.
 - In particular, World Health Organisation (WHO), which has as its objective to be the directing and coordinating authority among member countries in health emergencies, has proven to be too lethargic in reacting to pandemics in the past.
- It is due to this, world leaders are overwhelmed with their own national challenges and do not appear inclined to view the pandemic as a common enemy against mankind.
 - For example, China delayed reporting the virus to the World Health Organisation (WHO), and perhaps, in the process, contributed to the exacerbation of the spread of the virus across the globe.

Steps To Be Taken

The typical response by all affected nations has been to impose **'National distancing'** by closing borders. While this is no doubt, a most appropriate response, there is a much bigger and emergent need for leaders of nations to come together for collective global action. In this context:

- There is a need for a global institution that is not burdened with bureaucracy and can work on war footing to combat such global emergencies.
 - The G20, with co-option of other affected countries, itself might serve the purpose for the present.
 - Further, the collective action should ensure that shortages of drugs, medical equipment and protective gear do not come in the way of any nation's capacity to contain or fight the pandemic.

- There is a need to establish protocols, among participating countries to ensure seamless logistics for the supply chain for essential goods and services to function efficiently.
- There needs to be an instantaneous exchange of authenticated information on what clinical solutions have succeeded and what has not.
- The best way to ensure speedy research is to **pool global resources**. This may bring some acceptable commercial solution that adequately incentivises private research while ensuring benefits being available to the entire world at affordable costs.
Such a framework might be necessary for sustained collaborations for future challenges.
- There is a need to facilitate easy movement of trained health professionals across the world to train others and augment resources wherever there are shortages.
 - In other words, nations should come together to organise a global army to fight the pandemic, equipped with the best weapons and tools.
 - For example, Cuba has sent a team of 50 doctors to Italy, in order to help the country in dealing with Covid-19.

Conclusion

India's decision to convene a **meeting of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation countries (to discuss emergency plans in wake of Covid-19)** stands out in contrast to the indifferent leadership around the world. This may catalyse the collective global action to deal with the global emergency of Covid-19.

PESTEL Analysis: Measures To Be Taken

- **Political:** A global emergency requires global collective action.
- **Economical:** Economic stimulus package for tackling economic disruption caused by the pandemic.
- **Social:** Social distancing and national distancing hold the key, but much more needs to be done.
- **Technological:** Global collaboration in research and development, so that a vaccine can be developed as soon as possible.
- **Legal:** Effective implementation is important to the success of measures like lockdown.

Drishti Mains Question

Global emergencies require global collective action. Comment.