

Are we there yet? The transition from response to recovery for the COVID-19

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Abstract

There is no corner of the planet that has not been impacted by the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. While the COVID-19 pandemic has already had far-reaching socioeconomic consequences commonly associated with natural hazards (such as disruption to society, economic damage, and loss of lives), the response of governments around the world has been unparalleled and unlike anything seen before.

Governments are faced with a myriad of multi-dimensional effects of the pandemic, including direct impacts on public health systems and population health and indirect socioeconomic effects including disruption to every single sector of the economy and mass unemployment. There is, additionally, the growing realisation that the timescale associated with this crisis may permanently change the very foundations of societies 'normal' day-to-day life.

As the world transitions to recovering from COVID-19, those developing that recovery need support in adjusting and improving their policies and measures. The situation seems dire, the stakes are high. Literature about the transition between the response and recovery phase in relation to pandemics is scarce. Further complication is that the pandemic will not allow countries to simply transition to the full-scale recovery, instead, a rebound from recovery to response phase is expected for a certain period until the immunization is in place. Pandemics indeed force us to think beyond typical emergency management structures; the cycles of the disaster risk management in the case of biological and other natural hazards are not exactly the same and no one-size-fits-all approach may be used. Still, some parallels may be drawn with the efforts to combat natural hazards and some lessons may be used from previous and the current pandemic.

Based on these experiences and reflections, this paper provides a set of policy directions to be considered during the transition towards, as well as throughout, this transition phase. It is suggested that meeting this global, multi-dimensional, and complex challenge will require considerable international collaboration (even convention) and macro-scale changes to global and national policies. The recovery issues are mainly going to be dominated by politics, economics and social science. Necessary for an effective recovery, the pandemic response needs to be a holistic response, combined with an improved data ecosystem between the public health system and the community.

We should also view this outbreak and our response to it as an opportunity to learn lessons and reaffirm our universal commitment to sustainable development and enhancing wellbeing around the world.

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