

GLOBAL HEALTH DIPLOMACY, HUMAN SECURITY & REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

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Right from Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilisation we have arrived at the Clash of Crisis for our generation. This crisis is built around extreme weather events affecting countries in the form of natural disasters, a climate crisis that puts our world in peril and a pandemic like COVID-19 that forces our world to re-set at multiple levels.

Asia Pacific region is among the most vulnerable regions being hit hard due to disasters and extreme weather events. Arguably it is also among the rising powers for trade, innovation, affordable healthcare and intellectual capital. On the same note, the culture of rapidification of our world presents scope to build an interdisciplinary, cross sectoral convergent thematic area on health and foreign policy which countries can adopt and use to their advantage.

An interdisciplinary concept linking health and international relations

The crisis in global health will always and invariably have a spill-over effect on neighbouring countries. This will snowball into not just a health situation alone, but also impact social, economic, legal and commercial determinants of healthcare to a great extent. Naturally, so to say, it requires

supportive mechanisms and high-level frameworks established to focus on multiple disease burden along with country specific surge capabilities to handle such matters.

As globalization and its effect continues to magnify, diseases like Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, Malaria, SARS, MERS, Zika, Nipah, Ebola, COVID-19, Influenza also continue to spread directly and disrupts nations. This calls for urgently linking health and international relations where Foreign Ministries must start investing in public health staffing in their Embassies around the world. Problems of global health have become diverse over time with not just infectious diseases or management of tropical diseases, but also to deal with counterfeit drugs, digital health technologies, knowledge sourcing, medical tourism, vaccine exchange, health intelligence sharing and sharing of early warning signals, disaster response forces and building a stronger and more efficient network of public health professionals around and among nations for the greater self interest of every country and also for the greater good of humanity at large.

Strategic Opportunities for Diplomatic Missions & Foreign Ministries

The UN Charter of 1942 institutionalized the Red Cross doctrine of 1860s into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Convention. Oslo Ministerial Declaration in 2007 echoed and articulated the sentiments of Ministerial expressions to integrate health issues into foreign policy, making health a determinant in diplomatic parlance. Cascading risks of our times presents a perfect breeding ground to use this opportunity in all wisdom to foster co-operation beyond existential norms and stretch the very nature of regional co-operation politically, medically and socially. Historically in the past, nations looking after their own health was sufficient when medicines were limited and death was certain for most diseases, but with changing tide of research advancements, health transcends national boundaries and this is the opportune moment to further diplomatic foreign policy goals built on foundations of global public health.

This would be prudent to suggest that countries need to now create Health Attaché to their diplomatic staff in recognition of the growing risks, complexities of global health consequences and as part of a visionary strategic process to sustain shrewd diplomacy. The health attaché can possibly be a local national with reasonable public health expertise to navigate global health and foreign policy making it two sides of the same coin.

In epidemiological language, there is a growing realization that economic and political capital stands inadequate to meet rising disease burden and growing inequity which will force tough diplomacy to prioritize public and private sector commitment to meet resources to address rising challenges.