

COVID-19 and Human Security Challenges to Pakistan

Summar Iqbal Babar*
Hassan Zubair Malik**

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic reinvigorated the debate surrounding reconceptualization of the concept of security. The pandemic pushed the developing states such as Pakistan to undergo a paradigm shift to respond to a non-human entity which threatened economic health, human security, political stability and social fabric. This article employs the securitization theory to understand Pakistan's successful pandemic response. It analyses the early challenges facing Pakistan's, and proceeds to analyse state's health and economic interventions to mitigate both the virus spread and economic fallout for the weak segments of society. Building upon case studies of National Command and Control Center (NCOC) and Ehsaas programs, the article tries to map the future trajectory of human-centric security in Pakistan and the region. The article concludes with recommendations to utilize human security cooperation for the reinvigoration of SAARC.

* Assistant Professor, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

** Graduate Student, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic snuck up on an unprepared global community like a nightmare in 2019. Traditional state security systems built around the narrow conception of military threats lacked the capacity to understand, theorize and respond to a non-human threat in a timely and effective manner. The earliest containment measures such as lockdowns and curfews posed challenges of their own and were detrimental to human health, economic needs and social fabric. Markets suffered around the world as political systems struggled to decide between lockdowns and keeping the economies afloat. Resultantly, more people died from the COVID-19 globally than any single war since World War II.¹

In the absence of a security paradigm capable of accommodating a health security catastrophe, the COVID-19 struck indiscriminately. The developed states despite having huge economic resources and modern health infrastructure at their disposal could not mobilize them in time. The developing states like Pakistan were worse off. Strategic thought framed in an archaic guns-versus-butter debate put Pakistan in a dilemma of whether to prioritize economic or human health. Thus, innovative choices and novel practices had to be adopted to make up for the strategic limitations.

The chaos ensued by the COVID-19 pandemic has (once again) brought the case of expanding the traditional understanding of security to accommodate the newly-realized Non-Traditional Security (NTS) threats in a forceful manner. Whereas traditionally, militaries claimed centrality in security establishment on grounds of expertise, Coronavirus posed a multifaceted threat on economic, social, political, military and environmental fronts, requiring a unique synergy in state response. The strategic thought, thus, needs an overhaul to ensure comprehensive security. In this context, a

1 Milton Leitenberg, *Deaths in Wars and Conflicts in the 20th Century*, Occasional Paper 29 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Peace Studies Program, 2006), 86.

human-centric ideation of security can equip modern state with the necessary tools and ways to respond and provide relief and control measures to a wide range of threats in the 21st Century.

This article begins with an attempt to theorize the puzzle from a human security perspective. It takes note of the critical security studies in the post-Cold War era, and utilizes the Copenhagen School's Human Security to ideate about human-centric security studies. The next section evaluates Pakistan's health and economic challenges at the onset of pandemic, and utilizes the *securitization* theory to understand state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to support the argument that Pakistan fared well despite major challenges. The penultimate section tries to map future trajectory of human security in Pakistan and makes recommendations to utilize the NTS cooperation to reinvigorate the SAARC. A short passage concludes.

Theorizing the Puzzle

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted limitations of the conventional theory and practice of state provision of security. In the absence of clear causal relations, it became difficult to direct policy measures to contain the spread of virus and mitigate the political, social and economic fallout. The critical approaches to security originating in the early days of the post-Cold War security studies, therefore, become pertinent in understanding the pandemic as a threat to human security. Moreover, the securitization theory may also be employed to understand, contrary to the negative views of securitization process, how securitization played a positive and crucial role in Pakistan's pandemic response.

Critical Security Studies Approach

The critique on traditional state-centric security, its theory and practice has been around since the end of Cold War, but it took a virus to bring the so-called non-traditional dimensions of security in limelight. Whereas in traditional security, state was the 'main supplier, recipient, subject and

object of the security policies' and the threats were external (often from another state), non-traditional threats do not necessarily originate from other states, but may come from non-state and non-human agents both within and without the state.²

The notion of human security was articulated by Dr. Mehbub ul Haq for the first time. Human security is essentially the security against traditional and non-traditional threats faced by the humankind as a whole, thus giving it a universal character. As Dr. Haq suggested, the list of threats against which to secure human beings is far from exhaustive, but can be categorized into seven sectors: 1) economic security 2) food security 3) health security 4) environmental security 5) personal security 6) community security and 7) political security.³

Considering the non-traditional nature of threats emerging out of this reconceptualization of security, the human security has highlighted the need to rethink how we see, understand, and provide security in two ways:

1. State-centric security should give way to security of human individuals.
2. Armaments cannot provide human security; sustainable development must be prioritized.⁴

Copenhagen School's approach to non-traditional approach may also prove helpful in theorizing about pandemic response. According to Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, security is about survival, though the threats to security are not objective, but constructed.⁵ This happens through a *process* whereby a securitizing agent identifies an existential threat to a referent object. The agent then

2 Marina Caparini *et al.*, *Impact of COVID-19 on Human Security*, UN Report, (Rome: Centro Studi Internazionali, 2021), 5.

3 Mehbub ul Haq, *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: United Nations Development Program, Oxford University Press, 1994), 22.

4 Haq, *Human Development Report*, 24-25.

5 Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework of Analysis* (London: Rienner Publications, 1997).

performs a speech act to impress upon a target audience of the severity of the threat. Thus, the object's survival is shown to require extraordinary measures above day-to-day politics. Threats to referent objects are thus not taken as *given*, but presented as such by that securitizing actor. Thus, the Copenhagen School revitalized the traditional concept of security from a constructivist lens. Importantly, the school of thought sees securitization negatively and hence looks at ways to de-securitize.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a non-traditional threat, and hence from a traditional security lens, the pandemic was not to be seen as an existential threat to state thus requiring extraordinary measures. This limitation was evident in the early response of world in general and Pakistan in particular. Hence, a human security approach together with securitization process can help understand pandemic response. It can be argued that unlike Copenhagen's School view, securitization was *positive* necessity for resource-stressed developing states such as Pakistan if they were to prevent the "domino-like succession" of devastating impacts of the virus.⁶

Paradigm Shift in Security Studies

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the traditional security establishment to rethink security in human-centric terms. There are two aspects of this fundamental paradigm shift in the security studies:

1. Re-conceptualization of National Security to Accommodate Human Security

By the time WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a 'pandemic' on March 11, 2020, it was obvious that the states were struggling to contain the virus which was spreading at an unprecedented rate.⁷ The developed states which—by

6 Caparini *et al.*, *Impact of COVID-19*, 18.

7 World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19. March 11, 2020,

virtue of their social contract with the citizens—guaranteed the security of their citizens against traditional threats saw these guarantees crumble as Coronavirus infected people by millions. The developing states were faced with a dilemma. Advanced nuclear states such as Pakistan and India which boast off their deterrence-based state security had neither plans nor infrastructure in place to respond to the pandemic and ensuing economic, social and political crises. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear as day: complex security problems of the 21st Century cannot be understood and dealt with using traditional military security policies, strategic thought and arsenals. The nature of conflict has drastically changed; states are faced with novel threats including (but not limited to) diseases, environmental calamities, climate crisis, resource shortages, social strife etc. Humans find themselves at war with forces of nature, one which has been aggrieved by anthropogenic activities. This warrants crucial adaptation by states to provide human security against threats from a plethora of sources where causal relations are often blurred and hurt people indiscriminately. To quote French President Emmanuel Macron's national address regarding counter-COVID measures on 16 March, 2020: "We are at war."⁸

2. Human-centric Security Paradigm in Aid of Democracy

The non-traditional security paradigm has also highlighted limitations of the conventional social contract-basis of the state system. Advanced democracies faced resistance in virus containment efforts put up by groups from across the political spectrum—far right/far left, ideological parties, religious groups. Nascent democracies with a history of internal conflicts saw the socio-economic, ethnic, racial and religious faultlines being highlighted once again. Some

<https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

- 8 Elysee Palace. Address to the French by the President of the Republic. March 16, 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/03/16/adresse-aux-francais-covid19>

reverted back to varying levels of authoritarianism. This has highlighted one important aspect of human security: non-traditional threats cannot be responded to by state *alone*. The youth bulge in young democracies is accompanied by a wish of young people to be given an inclusive role in decisions of public importance. Thus, an effective NTS response must bring the civil society, private stakeholders and citizens onboard with state authorities. Since a healthy democracy can provide such inclusivity, the social contract needs an overhaul. A human-centered approach has the capacity to strengthen democracy in the face of COVID-19 and rising tide of authoritarianism.

COVID-19 Response: Case Study of Pakistan

Pakistan's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic was a success story few could have foreseen. At the onset of the pandemic, a plethora of challenges faced the policy-makers. A geostrategic posture, based on its geopolitical experiences has traditionally hampered the alternative security considerations. Thus, owing to poor economic health, Pakistan has historically faced a 'guns vs. butter' dilemma. But when the pandemic hit, the need to strike a delicate balance between the limited resources was immediately acknowledged. The case study below examines the initial challenges facing state authorities unprepared for a non-traditional security threat response, and how innovation allowed Pakistan to turn a potentially disastrous situation into a success story.

Developing State Dilemma – Prioritize Economy or Human Health?

The initial confusion observed in Pakistan's pandemic response may be attributed to a major dilemma facing the decision-makers: whether human health should be prioritized over economic health or *vice versa*? It presented a *catch-22* situation for the state: imposing a lockdown to preserve public health would adversely impact their livelihood, cause job loss, and exacerbate poverty, increase inflation and resultantly threat individuals' health and wellbeing.

Maintaining the economic activity at pre-COVID levels would allow the virus to spread, sicken a large portion of workforce, eventually resulting in economic degradation to a point of no return. Thus, any pandemic response strategy needed to be human-centric, striking a perfect balance between saving the citizens from both virus and hunger.

Underdeveloped Health System

Public health system has never been a priority in Pakistan. Unlike 115 states that recognize health as a fundamental right, Pakistan's constitution is silent on this matter.⁹ At the onset of the pandemic, the national health budget stood at Rs. 508.4 billion (\$3.35 billion), comprising 1.1 percent of GDP.¹⁰ The structural weaknesses were evident from lack of health infrastructure, inadequately-trained staff, shortage of ventilators, personal protective equipment (PPE), and ICUs. Lack of Research and Development (R&D) facilities resulted in dependency upon foreign sources to provide equipment, technical help, knowledge and vaccines. It is no surprise that the health system was unprepared for a health crisis as Pakistan is among the last two states still to be declared 'polio-free.'¹¹

Pakistan's Economic Woes

Pakistan's economy is not its strongest credential. With a population of 220.1 million, per capita income stands at \$1,188.8. Fulfilling the needs of such a huge population was already difficult with a humble economy, and Coronavirus pandemic worsened its multifaceted problems. To get a

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- 9 Dr. Sania Nishtar, "Health and the 18th Amendment: Retaining National Functions in Devolution," *Heartfile* (2012). http://www.heartfile.org/pdf/HEALTH_18AM_FINAL.pdf
 - 10 Dr. Pervez Tahir, "Has COVID-19 Made Health Budgets Respectable?", *The Express Tribune*, June 20, 2020. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2250290/covid-19-made-health-budgets-respectable#:~:text=In%202019%2D20%2C%20the%20total,2%20billion%20in%20Sindh%2C%20Rs51>
 - 11 WHO, "Pakistan and Afghanistan: The Final Wild Poliovirus Bastion," January 4, 2019. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/pakistan-and-afghanistan-the-final-wild-poliovirus-bastion>

holistic picture, this section considers the pandemic's impact on economic growth, and resultant poverty, inflation and job loss.

Economic Growth

When the first case of COVID-19 emerged, Pakistan's economy was already in recession after it faced difficulties on the external front and applied for an IMF Extended Fund Facility (EFF) in July 2019. As seen in figure 1, Pakistan's annual GDP growth had fallen to -0.5 percent by 2020.¹² Therefore, Pakistan's economic woes were expected to worsen as the pandemic impacted the wheels of economy.

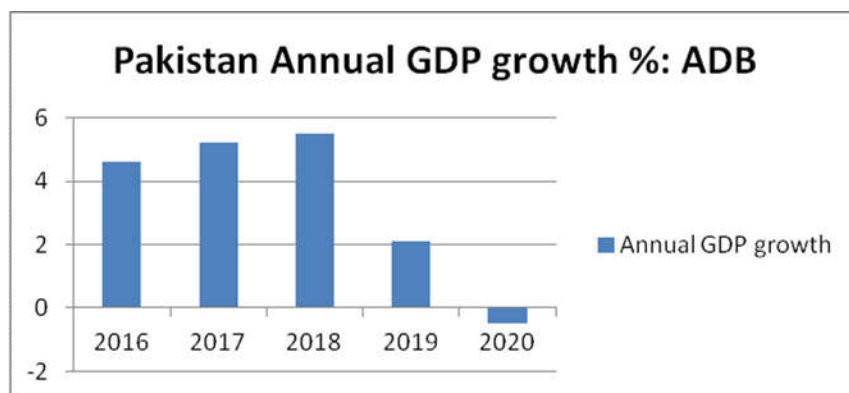


Figure 1: SOURCE: Asian Development Bank GDP Growth, Asian Development Outlook Update 2021 – September 2021 (XLSX)

Poverty

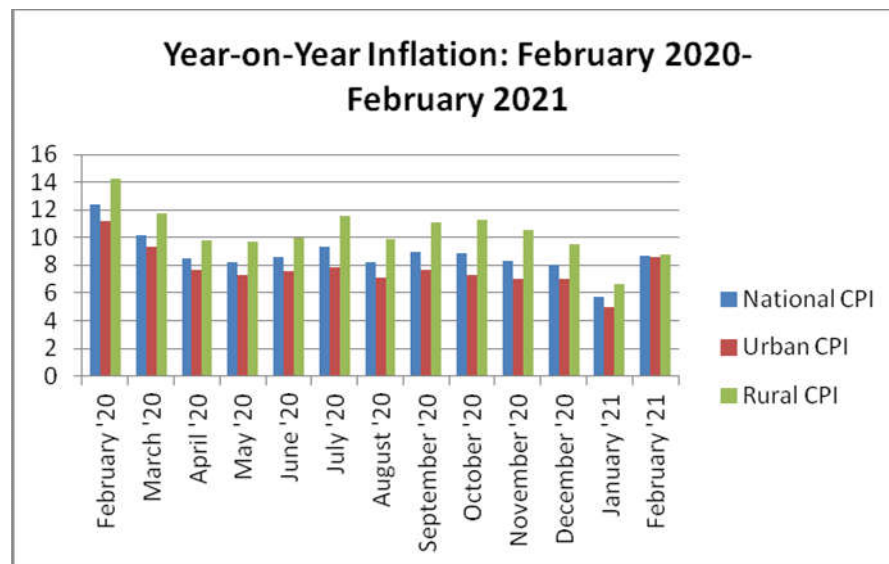
According to World Bank report, Pakistan had made impressive gains in poverty reduction pre-COVID, reducing the poverty headcount (on international poverty line; \$1.90/day purchasing power parity) from 31.0 to 4.0 percent (2001-2015). But the economic recession since February 2020 is estimated to have reversed the gains significantly. In FY 2019-20, international poverty line estimates jumped up

12 ADB, GDP Growth in Asia and the Pacific, *Asian Development Outlook* (ADO), 2021. <https://data.adb.org/dataset/gdp-growth-asia-and-pacific-asian-development-outlook>

to 5.3 percent.¹³ Joblessness, income reduction/loss, and inflation which resulted from COVID-19 lockdown and economic slowdown have further exacerbated the situation. The poverty levels also differed for rural and urban poor.

Inflation

Interestingly, Pakistan performed rather well in maintaining inflation well below grim financial forecasts. In this regard, government's Rs. 900 billion (\$5.66 billion) economic relief package was a timely measure. While Rs. 200 billion (\$1.25 billion) were reserved for low-income groups, Rs. 280 billion (\$1.76 billion) were meant for wheat procurement.¹⁴ Moreover, to transfer the benefit of global oil prices crash to the public, the government slashed the petroleum prices.



13 World Bank, "Poverty & Equity Brief Pakistan South Asia October 2021," *World Bank Group*, October 2021. https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2021/Global_POVEQ_PAK.pdf

14 Aamir Latif, "COVID-19: Pakistan Unveils Economic Relief Package," *Anadolu Agency*, March 24, 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/covid-19-pakistan-unveils-economic-relief-package/1777961>

Figure 2: SOURCE: State Bank of Pakistan, Inflation Monitor. URL: https://www.sbp.org.pk/publications/Inflation_Monitor/index2.htm

Job Loss

Pakistan has the 9th largest labour force in the world. Before the pandemic hit, 4.65 percent of workforce faced unemployment,¹⁵ but the economic forecasts of potential impacts of lockdowns by national and international financial observers were grim. Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimated that lockdown-induced job losses could range between 1.2 million to 3.2 million jobs. By third week of March 2020, Pakistan Planning Commission estimated 20 percent workforce (1.4 million) to lose their job.¹⁶

Lack of NTS-oriented Institutions

Though the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and its provincial equivalents worked Pakistan's initial response in the weeks following the first COVID-19 case, but a traditional, post-disaster relief management institution was not adequate to proactively contain an NTS threat before it spiralled out of control. As "human security is easier to ensure through early prevention," it was required to establish a proactive, data-driven institutional structure to respond to the many aspects of the raging pandemic.¹⁷

Political Will and Societal Ignorance

The weaknesses of grassroots politics in Pakistan hampered state's pandemic response. Local political elite showed no

15 World Bank, "Poverty & Equity Brief Pakistan South Asia October 2021," *World Bank Group*, October 2021. https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2021/Global_POVEQ_PAK.pdf

16 Sushant Sareen, "COVID-19 and Pakistan: The Economic Fallout," *Observer Research Foundation*, June 2020. https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ORF_OccasionalPaper_251_COVID19-Pakistan.pdf

17 Haq, *Human Development Report*, 22

ownership to the national containment efforts, and continued with their petty politics. Individual and societal ignorance made the pandemic response even more difficult. The ignorance, refusal to abide by preventive SOPs, and faith-based explanations for the virus were in abundance (for instance: 1. virus being a wrath of the Almighty 2. Muslim ablution can wash away Coronavirus 3. Xenophobic beliefs that only *haram* meat such as sold in Wuhan exotic animal market contains virus 4. Only mass repentance can and will end this pandemic).

Pakistan's COVID-19 Response Strategy

As the public faced the dual-faced menace (health and economic insecurity) of COVID-19, the state stepped in with policy interventions and innovative strategies to ensure the survival of the most vulnerable sections of the society. Despite initial confusion in the policy circles, the securitization of COVID-19 allowed the decisions makers to understand the severity, prevent underestimation, and respond effectively through a *test, learn, and adapt* strategy. On the health and economic front, state made significant gains which helped Pakistan to fare better than regional states, earning it global appreciation.

Securitizing COVID-19 in Pakistan

Multiple securitizing agents may be identified in Pakistan which sought to securitize COVID-19 in Pakistan. Chief Minister Sindh Murad Ali Shah, citing the fears that the widespread viral infections in his province could spiral out of control, announced a complete lockdown starting from March 23, 2020.¹⁸ When faced with the *developing state dilemma*, Mr. Shah claimed that economic recovery was possible, but if a large portion of workforce in Pakistan's densely-populated economic hub—Karachi, Sindh—was to be infected, repercussions would be far-reaching. Hence, to

18 Geo News, "Coronavirus Pandemic: CM Sindh Murad Ali Shah Announces Province-wide Lockdown, March 22, 2020. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/278592-announcement-about-lockdown-in-sindh-to-be-made-today-cm-murad>

him, COVID-19 posed an existential threat to human security. His rationale was picked up by celebrities, several of whom took to social media to voice their agreement.¹⁹ Sindh's containment strategy was soon adopted by other provinces.

Another securitizing agent can be identified in the federal government: Prime Minister Imran Khan. Criticizing Sindh government, the premier claimed that a complete lockdown would exacerbate the economic conditions for large population. Thus, he suggested that economic impacts of COVID-19 could pose an existential threat to the economically weakest segment of the society. He directed his speech acts at the international community, seeking debt relief for the developing countries such as Pakistan.

Arguably, both attempts at securitization, though contrasting in nature, proved beneficial as federal and provincial governments started to coordinate on pandemic response through the NCOC. They refined the contours of lockdown policy, developing a 'smart lockdown' strategy. It was augmented by expansion of state's social security net through Ehsaas emergency cash programme. Thus, securitization of COVID-19, unlike the Copenhagen School's thesis, proved positive in case of Pakistan, and resulted in innovative pandemic response.

Health Interventions

The 18th Amendment to the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan has devolved health sector to the four federating units. Still, COVID-19 pandemic presented a situation where collaborative action was needed to contain the virus and preventing it from becoming endemic. Therefore, in April 2020, the federal government established a unified federal structure called the National Command and Control Center (NCOC) involving federal, provincial and local government

19 *DAWN Images*, "These Pakistani Celebs Want You to Stay Safe and Stay Home," March 23, 2020. <https://images.dawn.com/news/1184903>

officials. Its mandate was to oversee pandemic-related coordination, policymaking and implementation.

The NCOC was to fulfil its mandate through:

1. Bringing together policy-makers, health experts, civil administration, military, and other national and international stakeholders for developing necessary policy interventions for disease detection, quarantine, containment, and vaccination.
2. Employment of technology (data collection, big data analytics, future trajectory predictions for proactive actions etc.) in aid of effective policymaking.
3. Strategy development for public awareness campaigns through print, electronic, and social media.

Vaccine Rollout

Due to underdeveloped health Research and Development (R&D) facilities, Pakistan was dependent upon foreign sources for vaccine acquisition, storage, and turning vaccines into vaccination. While government allocated more than \$1.25 billion to procure vaccines, bilateral or multilateral vaccine access programmes donated 43 percent of vaccines.²⁰

Pakistan was the biggest beneficiary of vaccine donation pledges by major world powers and international alliances. China, Pakistan's closest ally, pledged 3.7 million vials to be donated.²¹ United States also pledged more than 30 million vaccines. The United Nations-led COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access/The Vaccine Alliance (COVAX/GAVI)

20 UNICEF, "Pakistan Humanitarian Situation," Report No. 31, November 30, 2021.

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Pakistan%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%2031%20-%20November%20-2021.pdf>

21 Bridge Beijing, "China's Vaccine around the World," February 7, 2022. <https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/>

allocated 229.1 million vials in an effort to vaccinate 20 percent of Pakistan's population free of cost.²²

The NCOC started vaccination of frontline health workers and elderly on March 10, 2021. The table 1 shows the details of the 179.8 million vaccine vials Pakistan has received (as of November 30, 2021) either as donations or through bilateral agreements.²³ At the time of writing, Pakistan has fully vaccinated 88.86 million people, while 113.9 million have received at least one dose.²⁴

Vaccine	Doses
Cansino	2,841,200
PakVac (vaccine concentrate imported from CansinoBio and packaged by NIH in Pakistan)	6,997,320
Sinopharm Covax	8,845,200
Sinpharm Bilateral/Donations from China	30,920,000
Sinovac	77,500,000
Pfizer Covax	20,121,260
Pfizer Bilateral	6,259,500
AstraZeneca Covax	8,071,800
Moderna Covax	9,248,000
Sputnick	9,000,000
Total	197,804,280

Table 1: Vaccines Received by Pakistan till November 20, 2021

Economic Intervention

The state undertook multiple economic measures on both the macroeconomic and microeconomic front. Since the lowest section of the society was most vulnerable to

22 Katharina Buchholz, "Which Countries Are Still Waiting for COVAX Doses?" January 18, 2022. <https://www.statista.com/chart/24520/covid-19-vaccines-delivered-under-covax>

23 UNICEF, "Humanitarian Situation Report," 9.

24 NCOC, "Vaccine Stats," 2022. <https://ncoc.gov.pk/>

economic disruption brought on by COVID-19 pandemic, the state primarily focused on expanding its social security net through the government poverty alleviation and social security programme.

Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme

Pakistan had limited social insurance coverage pre-pandemic; timely measures were needed to mitigate financial difficulties due to lockdown-induced economic disruption. In March 2020, the Government of Pakistan, through its nascent social security and poverty alleviation programme “Ehsaas” started an emergency cash delivery programme. Ehsaas provided demand-based assistance to nearly 100 million Pakistanis (46.6 percent of 220.1 million) through one-time cash delivery totalling Rs. 179 million or Rs. 12,000 per family (\$78.5 in March 2021 conversion rates).

The government employed latest technology to streamline data collection. As a starting point, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) proved invaluable. The national social security database thus established coupled existing data of National Socioeconomic Registry with new data on population turned economically vulnerable in face of the pandemic-related economic slowdown. The programme was fully automated; wealth profiling utilized big data analytics to check eligibility. Applicants were evaluated based on immovable/movable property ownership, telephone bills, and presence of at least one public sector worker in the family.²⁵

Applications were accepted through SMS service (8171) using the National Identification Card (NIC) number (76.6 percent or 168.56 million out of 220.1 million had a cellular connection in 2019-20).²⁶ The process was automated,

25 Ehsaas, “Ehsaas Emergency Cash,” 2022. <https://www.pass.gov.pk/Detail/90ce1f7-083a-4d85-b3e8-60f75ba0d788>

26 PTA, “Telecom Indicators,” 2022. <https://www.pta.gov.pk/en/telecom-indicators/1>

biometrically-verified, transparent, and free of political intervention. In May 2021, a World Bank report acknowledged Ehsaas as the *third* largest social intervention programme in terms of percentage of population covered, and fourth largest by number of citizens covered.²⁷

Mapping the Future of Human Security in Pakistan

The COVID-19 pandemic served as an eye opener for the magnitude of threat posed by non-traditional security challenges. Pakistan had to employ a human security perspective to prevent a perfect storm. This paradigm shift has the potential to serve the state in any future security theorization and policymaking.

A human-centric security focus will arguably strengthen the federation. The National Command and Control Center (NCOC), for instance, provided a platform for governments across Pakistan to coordinate on policy and implementation in effective pandemic response. Such employment of technology and public access to information with little bureaucratic red tape is expected to bring transparency in hitherto closed-door policymaking.

The incumbent government has established a precedent for human security that is expected to grow in the coming years. Social security net, which expanded by 281 percent compared to pre-COVID levels, is expected to help alleviate poverty.²⁸ The first-ever National Security Policy (NSP) of Pakistan released on January 12, 2022 acknowledged the human security as a crucial aspect of comprehensive national security.

27 Ugo Gentilini et al., *Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2020).

28 Gentilini et al., Gentilini et al., *Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19*, 12.

Category	Total Beneficiaries	Amount Disbursed (in million Rupees)
Category I (include regular Ehsaas Kafaalat beneficiaries)	4,652,477	57,133.96
Category II (demand-based; 8171 SMS service)	3,627,556	43,530.67
Category III (identified by provincial officials)	3,133,853	37,606.24
Category III-A (Augments Cat. III)	583,050	6996.60
Category IV (website applications)	1,181,716	14,180.59
Category V	1,652,224	19,286.69
Total	14,830,876	179,274.75

Source: Ehsaas Dashboard

https://www.pass.gov.pk/ecs/uct_all.html

Sharing the Dividends – Regional Human Security

Pakistan's National Security Policy envisions "mutual coexistence, regional connectivity, and shared prosperity [as] essential prerequisites" to national security of individual states and regional peace.²⁹ Human security is not only a common need of all states, but the multifaceted challenges facing human beings, their needs, and complex interactions can be best solved through a collective effort. Hence, the NCOC can provide a model to be replicated under the

29 National Security Division, "National Security Policy of Pakistan: 2022-2026," National Security Division, Government of Pakistan, January 14, 2022, 12.

umbrella of SAARC at regional level for collective human security in South Asia.³⁰

Since Indo-Pakistan adversity has rendered the SAARC near-redundant, grabbing the low hanging fruits in form of cooperation on the NTS challenges which do not have a direct bearing on members' military security can reinvigorate the multilateral platform. Therefore, Pakistan is presented with a historic opportunity to make its knowledge and experience available to neighbouring states and take the lead in non-traditional security domain.

Conclusion

As the nature of conflict changes in the 21st Century due to non-traditional security challenges faced by the states, the COVID-19 has strengthened the case to re-conceptualize security. The developing states such as Pakistan were forced into a paradigm shift as their traditional security lens were rendered useless. But it was quick to adapt and secure human security needs. The NCOC and the Ehsaas programme are two cases in point. These two platforms can also provide models for multilateral human security and the NTS cooperation to reinvigorate the SAARC.

30 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a regional intergovernmental organization. Member states collaborate for human welfare, mutual assistance, and regional self-reliance.