SOCIAL COHESION, TRUST, AND GOVERNMENT ACTION AGAINST PANDEMICS*

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Abstract

The rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 and its corresponding COVID-19 is challenging national preparedness and response-ability to pandemics. No one is prepared well, but governments around the world must respond as effectively and efficiently as possible to pandemics, and every occurrence of such worldwide disease must be a lesson for preparedness. While plans and programs may be in place to arrest the rapid spread of the virus, the success of any state intervention relies much on how cohesive the society is, how trusting the people are, and how trustworthy the government is. Social cohesion begets trust, and trust engenders obedience and calm. The absence of social cohesion produces social unrest and social erosion, lack or absence of social trust creates risk societies, disobedience. When these conditions exist, the spread of a virus is inevitable. Furthermore, they create a pandemic of confusion and fear, of stigmatization and discrimination.

The ways that nations respond to the pandemic today and how the society responds to state actions will principally determine their lots and destinies in the next decades or even in the next elections. The pandemic reveals the quality of leaders and people a nation has. Governments that are successful at controlling the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and minimizing fatalities of COVID-19 will enjoy even more social cohesion and public trust, while those that deferred vigorous interventions to control its spread will see greater social stress and distrust, resulting in the paralyzation of the public's faith in leaders and government institutions.

Keyword: COVID-19, SARS-Cov-2, social cohesion, trust, pandemic

Introduction

The rapid worldwide spread of SARS-CoV 2 and its corresponding COVID-19 has put the world at a standstill, literally, and figuratively. With lockdowns and community quarantines around the word, the International Monetary Fund has declared an economic recession which is predicted to "be worse than the global financial crisis" (Bluedorn, Gopinath, Sandri 2020). There are chaos and violence in many countries as governments suspended work, transportation, and restricted movements of people. Supply of necessities and food has been disrupted leading to rationing of supplies in some countries and hunger to those who doesn't have access to such help. For example, in the Philippines each household is given a relief good of rice, canned goods, noodles, coffee, and other goods almost every week, especially to poor families. There are also social amelioration programs laid out by the government providing monetary aid to families of individuals who lost their jobs or source of income, senior citizens, and other identified beneficiaries (CNN 2020; Gita-Carlos 2020; Luci-Atienza 2020).

Responses to lockdowns are varied, and enforcement in some countries are rather violent. In the early days of Italy's lockdown, thousands of people defied the order and it caused the country

thousands of deaths and myriads of infections, and more stringent rules against movement of people, transportation, and business operations.   The rigid lockdown is set to end in May (EURACTIV 2020; Ruiz 2020). In India, we see the biggest lockdown in the world because of COVID-19, restricting the movement of more than 1.3 billion people. We have seen in the news and in social media how some Indian police used blocking, chasing, beating, yelling, or punishing us for venturing out, even deaths and higher domestic violence occurred, showing us the extreme difficulty of enforcing social and physical distancing and nationwide quarantine (Agence France-Presse 2020; Mohan 2020; Nigam, Saha, Pandey 2020).

In the Philippines, long lines in groceries and markets posed a great challenge to enhanced community quarantine implementers. Of particular difficulty is enforcement of the quarantine rules in slum areas. Fears of food shortage and stranded workers, long lines of people in checkpoints in the capital haunts the lockdown in the mainland Luzon. Although there have been no violent police acts against violators of the quarantine rules, besides simple punishments and penalties, enforcement remains a problem in densely populated areas (Fonbuena 2020; Philippine Daily Inquirer/Asia News Network 2020; Ratcliffe 2020).

Pandemics are complex situations and problems. They are not only a matter of health, but also matters of politics, culture, science, technology, religion, social systems, economy, etc. They are not merely anthropo-medical conditions but also geopolitical and environmental concerns. Each pandemic is different and thereby demanding diverse approaches and responses. They happen not only because of the presence of rapidly spreading virus, but also from the lack of, or ill-crafted pre-emptive public policies and structures. Such situation creates waves of social confusion and panic, uncontrolled wave of infection, and political and social unrest.

We have polarizing issues now that truly hampers effective and efficient response, like granting emergency powers to a government who cannot be trusted with such, use of armed forces to enforce quarantine or lockdown, availability, sourcing, realignment and allocation of budget, unprepared health departments, absence or lack of testing policies and unavailability of testing kits and centres, centralization vs. decentralization of donations, and response-ability of frontliners and related government departments. Critical voices have also been raised on the confusing rules on community quarantine, curtailment of some freedoms, protection of human rights during the quarantine period, continuity of delivery of basic social services and goods, ameliorations to the poor and displaced workers, protection and well-being of healthcare workers, travel restrictions, among others.

And then we have disobedience to social quarantine rules among many of our people. Either they are utterly unconcerned and do not care at all, or their social context does not give them the luxury of complying, like in areas where poverty and lack of education exist, in slum areas where social distancing is impossible, people who beg for food and money everyday just to survive, those who are paid for work on a daily basis, etc. It can also be that people are misappreciating their rights, privileges, and freedoms, or are unable to comprehend risks and dangers of COVID-19. Or maybe, just plain stupid hard-headedness and greater confidence in one's personal opinion and beliefs rather than authority directives.

In Italy alone, more than 8,200 people were charged for violating the lockdown rules as of 18 March 2020, and anyone caught on the streets without a valid reason were fined €206. In Spain, disobedient citizens to confinement rules were fined €100, or more, for minor infractions or up to a year in prison to those who resisted arrest or fine. French police handed fines of up to €135 to 4,095 people who breached the order to stay home. In the United Kingdom, Manchester lockdown police raided and stopped 600 parties and the government imposed a minimum penalty of £30 for violators. Similar incidents happened all over the United Kingdom with people ignoring government calls for citizens to stay home. Its even worse in the United States where people still flocked beaches and holiday areas, had parties and celebrations even as the government is trying its best to stop the rapid spread of the virus (Aspinwall 2020; Davies 2020; Samuel 2020; The Straits Times 2020).

The effects of pandemic can be aggravated by people's distrust of government due to widespread corruption, unorganized bureaucracy, political disintegration, distant government, and untrustworthy leaders who misused and abused power These conditions produce disobedient and fragmented citizenry and emboldens them to either be extremely critical or utterly oblivious to government interventions in time of pandemic. Furthermore, there appears to be common disregard and distrust in science among politicians and the populace. Scientists and medical specialist's opinions, recommendations and researches abound on SARS-CoV 2 and COVID-19 but these are perceived as alien to common experience and, due to ignorance and lack of scholarly orientation, unreal (i.e., detached from human reality, only for the books and conferences, too technical and difficult to understand, too elite, etc.). Governments ignored some of the warnings and recommendations and even downplayed the fears and predictions of researchers, resulting to the death and suffering of many, including healthcare workers (Bhanot 2020; Miller 2020; MSN News 2020; Reuters 2020; Siegel 2020; The Guardian 2020; UN News 2020).

Political conditions can also worsen the effects of pandemic, like politicizing the situation and responses, conflict between diplomatic interest vs. national interest, i.e., the Secretary of the Department of Health of the Philippines was hesitant to recommend travel ban against Chinese for fear that diplomatic relations with China may turn sour (Rosario 2020), division in government, election mentality, political bickering and mudslinging, party politics vs. national interest, etc. Business conditions can also contribute to pandemic spread. When companies value income and profit more than the safety and well-being of their workers, thus requiring them to report to work amidst pandemic. People need to work to earn and have something to eat and to support their families, especially those daily wage earners. So, they would rather choose to go to work than be quarantined.

All these situations are symptoms of a sick society and government. And when societies and government cannot function as one, pandemic thrives. Strong institutions, trusting populace, and durable social cohesion serve as antibodies of a country against pandemics. In particular, social cohesion and trust are foundations of an effective pandemic response, and conversely, effective pandemic response can produce a socially cohesive and trusting communities.

Social Cohesion as Foundation and Consequence of Effective Pandemic Response

Success in any response to national disasters rests primarily on how the people trust their political institutions and leaders, and in how much a community is cohesive. While relief operations and social amelioration programs may help, albeit provisionally, general and positive public response in the form of universal acceptance of common objective or purpose set by government and cooperation of majority of the population creates more lasting effect and success. Such condition can only exist when people are socially cohesive.

Social cohesion is the social foundation of effective pandemic response. Social cohesion is generally understood as "the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper" (Stanley 2003, 5). It can also be understood as the "extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society. It identifies two main dimensions: the sense of belonging of a community and the relationships among members within the community itself" (Manca 2014). These two definitions focus more on the aspect of willingness to cooperate, or solidarity to achieve a common goal which results from a deep sense of connectedness or belongingness among members of a given society.

Another understanding gives attention to social cohesion as a "state of affairs in which a group of people demonstrate an aptitude for collaboration that produces a climate for change" (Ritzen, Easterly, Woolcock 2000, 6). Within the concept of social cohesion are cognitive components like feelings of trust and trust-related sentiments, as well as behavioural components like engagements in public social life, in association and other civic structures (Schaeffer 2014, 8-9). Thus, social cohesion may be impossible or lacking when people are disunited, society is fragmented, there is ignorance and distrust to common goals and objectives, there is conflict between personal/family interest vs. public/national interest, etc.

A community with robust social cohesion is characterized by a common sense of unity and oneness, spirit of care and concern, of common moral duty and responsibility. These allows each member to behave and act for the greater good of the community to which they belong. Moreover, a cohesive society have a sense of common moral cause that permits each members to live and work harmoniously together, thereby promoting resilient social relationships and positive connectedness between members and the community, and has a pronounced focus on the common good (Dragolov et al. 2016, 6; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020; Delhey et. al. 2018, 430; Walkenhorst 2018). Each member of a cohesive society exhibits a sense of community, duty and responsibility, oneness with a common cause and end, has spirit of care and concern, sense of unity with other members, mutual support and cooperation, emotional connectedness with other members, and a sense of the common good vis-à-vis personal good. They have trust in social institutions, respect for social rules, see fairness in the management and distribution of resources and goods. These characteristics of social cohesion is aptly illustrated in the figure below.
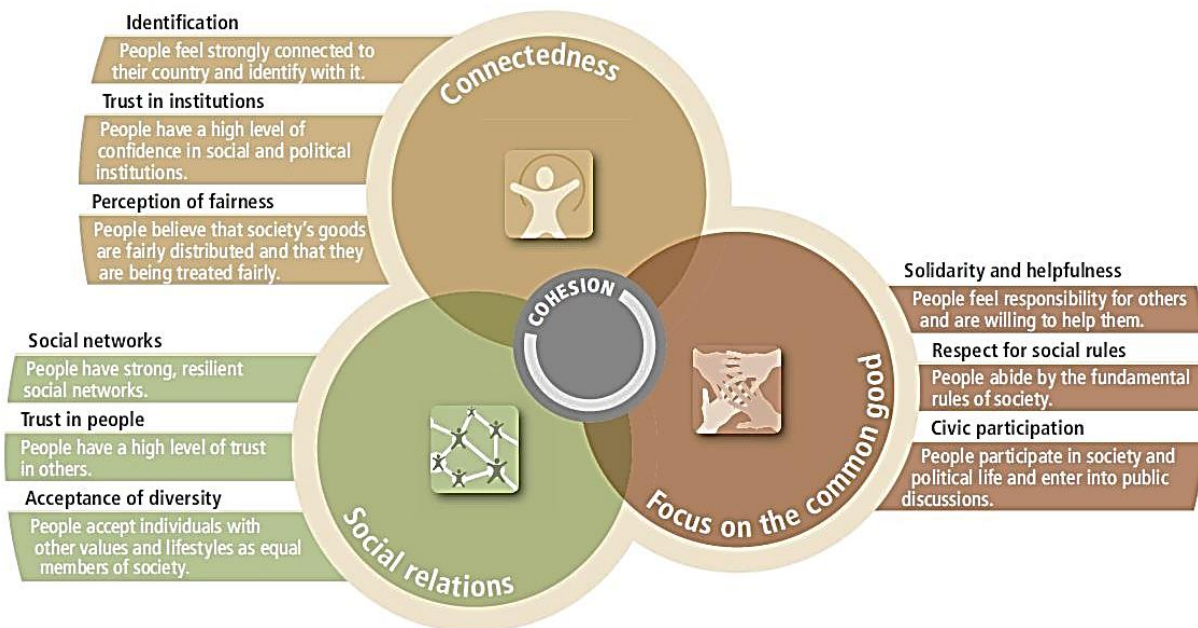
Figure 1. The Social Cohesion Radar (SCR) showing the domains and dimensions of social cohesion (Adopted from Bertelsmann Stiftung by Delhey et. al., 2018, 431).

Although there is no universal agreement on whether social cohesion is a cause or a consequence of other aspects of socio-economic and political life, it is believed that it is either an independent variable that generates outcomes for a given community, or a dependent variable, that is, "the result of actions in one or more realms" (Beauvais and Jenson 2002, 2).

Success of pandemic response of any given government is not only dependent on the capacity and capability of health care professionals in treating the patients, as well as the efficiency of scientists in finding a cure and vaccine, but also, on the quality of the community and its people. If a government leads in a socially cohesive community, then its programs and plans against pandemics can be easily accepted and implemented and will generate beneficial outcomes for the people and the government itself. On the other hand, an effective response and acceptable policies of a government can effect a socially cohesive community. In this case, the government was able to unite its people to a common cause through effective and credible leadership and reasonable program and plans.

Disobedience to and rejection of anti-pandemic policies results from many factors. It can be that the government has lost its credibility because of bad leadership, prevalence of graft and corruption, pervasive political bickering, poor implementation of projects and programs, or utter disregard for social services. Social conditions can also contribute to such risky behaviours, such as, unemployment, prevalence of poverty, poor health and education, pervasive social ignorance, herd mentality, unjust social structures, etc. Cultural conditions can also promote disobedience, like pathological hard-headedness or stubbornness of many who would rather subscribe to their own opinion and belief rather than accept and comply with authority directives, blind belief to unfounded superstitions, unreasonable religious practices, and supernatural remedies, perception

of science as distant, exclusive, and elitist, social insensitivity and nonchalance, individualism, etc.

These conditions of non-cohesive societies fragmentalizes communities and foster vulnerability and susceptibility to dangers and risks. Whatever intervention a government implements in such societies will either fail, derailed, or met with great opposition and suspicion because it will never be able to solicit the respect, cooperation, solidarity, care and concern that one normally gets from a cohesive society.

Shaeffer designates the term social cohesion to those collective resources like general levels of trust and civic engagement. These two helps a community to work together and achieve identified goals or objectives. He further differentiated behavioural and cognitive dimensions of social cohesion, the former related to civic participation or engagement, and the latter to trust-related sentiments. He opined that social cohesion results from the synergy of the two (Shaeffer 2014, 9). That brings us to the second foundation and consequence of effective pandemic response – trust.

Trust as Foundation and Consequence of Effective Pandemic Response

The key to the development and sustainability of social cohesion is trust. Edelman claims that we are living in trust paradox, an antimony. He noted the developments experienced around the world, the rise of employment and better standard of living, and yet the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer tells us that no government, business, NGOs and media are ever trusted. It was further claimed that "the cause of this paradox can be found in people's fears about the future and their role in it, which are a wake-up call for our institutions to embrace a new way of effectively building trust: balancing competence with ethical behaviour" (Edelman 2020). Trust, then, is a behaviour and an outcome at the same time.

There are three levels of trust involved in effective pandemic response: personal, system and social. Personal trust "involves an emotional bond between individuals, and the emotional pain that each would experience in the event of betrayal serves as the protective base of trust even where other types of short-term gains could be realized by breaking the trust" (Lewis, Weigert 1985, 974). This is the general trust we each accord to others, that when broken, we detached from the object of trust and may have an effect in the way we trust systems and institutions. Nonetheless, such emotional bond does not exist in system trust which is activated by the appearance that everything seems in proper order (Luhman 1982, 40-41).

Social trust, on the other hand, "is a belief in the honesty, integrity and reliability of others – a faith in people" (Pew Research Center 2007). It is also characterized by "perceived objectivity, consistency, competence and fairness" in the functioning of a society (Boslego 2005, 1454). There are certain macro circumstances that fuel a culture of (social) trust, and these are the normative ordering of social life (law, morality, and custom), stability of the social order,

transparency of the social organization, presence of a familiar environment, and accountability mechanisms (Sztompka 1999, 122–125).

The characteristics mentioned above shows the indispensability of social trust for the effective functioning of political power or government. Without social trust in the reliability, effectiveness, and legitimacy of laws and governments, modern social institutions would soon collapse. One definitive sign that a social system is under severe pressure is generalized loss of social trust in the legitimacy of political leadership and authority and in interpersonal trust in everyday life. Durkheim (2013) believes that institutional trust underwrites interpersonal trust, so, as social trust in common public institutions wear away, trust in other persons ultimately is also eroded.

Now, trust as a behavioural manifestation of a person's commitment to the values and norms of a community, entails faith that the other members of the community will cooperate for a common good, even though benefits may not be equal (Fukuyama1995: 25; Schaeffer 2014, 38-39). This is the very foundation of cooperation and solidarity. When social trust is high, people are more likely have a collective sense of well- being. If people do not trust others to be trustworthy, then you can never expect them to cooperate. When people do not trust their government, then government will not find it easy to implement plans and programs or enforce ordinances and laws. What a government set as a common good may not be perceived as such by the people, especially if this runs counter to their values and norms.

On the other hand, social trust can also be a by-product, a consequence of something that is favorable to common good or is aligned to common moral commitment. In the case of pandemic, a government that is perceived to be effective and efficient in responding to the effects of the plague, will enjoy greater social trust now and in the future, and foster active citizenship. "Trust is one of the most beneficial byproducts of effective leadership; it underpins any successful functioning of a government, an economy, and a functioning civil society" (Schoen 2013, 57). Conversely, the absence of social trust in government indicates a leadership that has failed or gone askew. This loss of trust in government and leadership renders a country incapable of facing enormous challenges, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Loss of social trust disables leadership and governance in the midst of pandemic since they will find it more difficult or challenging to win the public's support, and to implement policies and rules addressing the problem. So, we see public disobedience to enhanced community quarantine or lockdowns, resistance to limitation of movement, myriads of complaints, uncooperative populace, public intolerance to procedural blunders and unintended utterances of political leaders, and blatant opposition to any government plan or action. And in situations like this, some governments resort to violence, intimation, and threat to command public obeyance.

Social and Cohesion and Trust in Pandemic Response

Social trust between citizens is said to be indispensable for social cohesion, integration and stability (Newton, Stolle, and Zmerli 2013, 38). If social cohesion and trust are lacking, or is deficient in each community, it leads to social erosion or breakdown of unities and solidarities, and hinders social identification to a common purpose, as well as, collective action against

pandemics. A pandemic prepared and responsive community is resilient and is conscious of its ontological safety, but in the absence of social cohesion and trust, it becomes a society at risk, fragile, and susceptible to danger. Rather than promoting greater well-being and good, it indorses pandemic of fear and confusion, stigmatization and discrimination, and ineffectiveness and inefficiency. We have seen how healthcare providers are maltreated because of lack of care and concern and strong sense of common good, how families of COVID-19 positive patients are discriminated and stigmatized because of lack of solidarity, how volunteers in quarantine checkpoints are scorned and cursed because of inability to comprehend and inculcate the primacy of greater good, etc.

We see governments in quandary because the public cannot see the effectiveness of their plans and solutions, not the reasonableness of their policies. We see leaders publicly scorned, called to reassign in the midst of the pandemic, satirized and demonized in social media because people don't see them as credible and effective, thus they cannot be trusted. Schoen believes that "so long as the trust crisis goes unaddressed, don't expect the twenty-first-century challenges of epidemic and pandemic alleviation to take major steps forward" (2013, 42). The rapid rise of positive cases and deaths in the United States is said to be due to lack of social cohesion among Americans," showing that, obviously, a startling lack of civic solidarity among Americans (Caren, 2020).

Building Cohesive and Trusting Communities through Effective Pandemic Response

Every government, to be effective in responding to future pandemics must do two things: first, implement effective measures against COVID-19 now to build greater trust in government's credibility and abilities, and, second, do social engineering aimed at building greater local and national social cohesion after this pandemic so that future governments and communities will be better prepared and united in combating future pandemics.

To do these, government leaders, when responding to pandemics, must be able to strike a balance between social needs and resource constraints, peace and order, people's rights, varied interests, and conflicting values. While it is necessary to have armed forces to man check points and enforce quarantine or lockdown rules, government must ensure that no human rights are violated in imposing sanctions, punishments, rules, and regulations, that basic social needs are not denied nor their fulfilment not impeded severely, and that limited resources are distributed justly (e.g., test for COVID-19 should not obviously prioritize politicians and their families who are merely suspected to have been infected at the expense of those who are already exhibiting symptoms and yet they don't have access to testing kits, some dying without even knowing whether they are positive or not). People must be convinced that all programs and plans to combat the pandemic are meant for the greater good and public interest and not to further any political interest of a party or any individual (e.g., no name of politician should appear in the relief goods or in donations and assistance provided to hospitals and other frontline facilities, etc.).

On the other hand, people must also be reassured that government programs are not simply to product of whims or haphazard planning and shallow information, nor are these plans and

programs a creation of politicians and ex-military generals who doesn't have any idea of the dynamics of a virus in a pandemic. Government must actively involve, or even give leadership roles to scientists, healthcare professionals, and other related experts, so that judgments and plans are in conjunction with research, science, and medicine. In the Philippines, for example, the Inter-Agency Task Force created by the President to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic has more politicians that medical doctors and scientists. While the State Department of Health is tasked to lead the response, decisions are rather more political, and weighed down by election interest, corruption, bickering, red tape, and delays due to bureaucratic protocols and priorities. It is not the Health Secretary who is the chief implementer of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but an ex-military general and the current Presidential Peace Adviser, igniting fears of social conditioning for martial law declaration, a fear that's been in the air in Philippine politics since President Duterte was elected into office.

For governments to be assured of the public's trust, and thus, become compliant and responsive to emergency pandemic rules and policies, the following principles can be adopted. First, the principle of maximization, a substantive principle which, in the context of pandemic, dictates that we must do the most good, i.e., health care for the greater majority, amidst limited available resources. Policies and decisions based on this principle must aim to save the most lives or maximize the health benefits with the available resources. Reasonable triage rules must be in place, and people well informed about them to avoid unrest and complaints.

Second principle is that of equity and fairness (distributive justice). Fairness and distributive justice demand that government should give equal weight to equal claims of individuals. It also requires avoidance of discrimination and partiality towards different classes of people (i.e., rich vs. poor, powerful vs. powerless, politicians vs. commoners, rural vs. urban, etc.). The principle of distributive justice provides "moral guidance for the political processes and structures that affect the distribution of benefits and burdens in societies" (Lamont, Favor 2017). Distributive justice necessitates that available resources or goods and burdens are to be distributed according to the individual's needs, contribution and responsibility and the society's or organization's responsibility to the common good. So, it may be just that the national capital area receives more budget and supplies than provincial areas, considering its centrality in business, finance, governance, and international importance, and is of high risk for mass infection. The principle also demands that more resources must be given to areas with greater infection cases, or people with greater responsibility in society be given priority in testing and treatment.

In the context of health care, distributive justice requires that everyone receive equitable access to basic health care services that are necessary for living a quality human life as required by right to health. It also implies that society has a duty to the individual in serious need and that all individuals have duties to others in serious need. In such case, there may be some rights and privileges that needs to be sacrificed for the greater good. In decisions regarding the allocation of available resources (i.e., rationing decisions), the duty of society is not diminished because of the person's status or nature of illness. So, it will be unjust to deny or delay health care to people who are poor and underprivileged since all must equitably share in the benefits of public health

care. Triage policies must recognize the indispensable and objective equality of patients so that allocation decisions should not be grounded upon judgments of the subjective quality of patients. And, of course, all must also share not only of the benefits but also the burdens of pandemic response. Distributive justice and fairness enjoins all to be responsible citizens, i.e., not compromising public health by following quarantine rules, not hoarding or panic buying at the expense of the poor and underprivileged, etc.

On the other hand, distributive justice and fairness also demands that governments must be aware that unequal weight is given to unequal claims. This is important in decision of equitable distribution of limited resources and equitable services of limited workforce. COVID-19 positive patients have stronger claims to life-saving resources than persons under monitoring or under investigation (suspected COVID-19 patients). High-risk population may have greater claims to resource and services than low-risk population, healthcare workers may have higher claim to available resources than the rest of the population by virtue of responsibility and function, and in the language of utilitarianism, younger people may have greater claim than older people based on productivity and utility (also known as fair innings argument - this is debatable and unacceptable to some, especially when seen in light of equal access to benefits and equal right to health).

The third principle of effective government pandemic response is impartial procedures and accountability. This demands fairness in government procedures in the just distribution of resources and services, and benefits and burdens. Fair procedure and accountability entails transparency in procurement and distribution of resources, allocation and spending of budget, and in the acceptance and utilization of donations from private entities and countries. Accountability also requires a clear and well-established chain of command, with publicly identified key persons and their responsibilities, as well as reporting procedures and publicity rules. In this way, the public feel more secured knowing that their taxes are well spent and that they benefit from it, and with the assurance that there are people in government who are ready to take good care of them in times of pandemic. Rules on social amelioration programs, relief goods distribution, financial support for indigents and unemployed, continued social services (i.e., transportation, market hours, bills payment, etc.), work and education suspension, face ask and personal protective equipment use, lockdown, etc., must all be weighed vis-à-vis fairness and justice. In the Philippines, when Congress crafted a law giving the President emergency powers, they required him to submit to the legislative department and to the people a weekly accountability report on the use of approved budget and allocation of available resources, as well as implemented and planned COVID-19 countermeasures. Such requirement aims to solicit the trust of the people to the government and their leaders.

And lastly, the principle of adequate and well-defined information. This mandates that all information about the COVID-19 pandemic and government programs and plans must be presented in a way that it can be understood by all, including the terms and conditions of response, and the principles (legal, ethical, and moral) from which these were founded. Trust and confidence comes easy when people are well-informed, and governments can expect them to

obey easily. So, press conferences or briefings, and public information campaigns should be done in the common language of the people. While English is the second national language of the Philippines, press conferences of the Inter-Agency Task Force, the Department of Health, and even of the President (who is not so fluent in Filipino), are mostly given in English and not in Filipino, which is the primary language of the people.

These principles, when complied with, may usher a more trusting a more cohesive citizenry, to the benefit of the people and the government, and those who are in positions of power now and are planning to run for public office in the next election – call it mutual benefit.

Promoting social cohesion through effective pandemic response may not be easy for governments whose leaders are no credible and effective. For any government who wishes to promote social cohesion after pandemics, they must display confident and credible leadership that unites people under one cause, the common good, rather than sowing division, fear, and confusion. Government must ensure that the elected leaders can be trusted to stir successfully their communities away from pandemic, or to encourage solidarity among its constituents by being active, fair, and exhibiting good interpersonal relationship. The leader must eb able to fully inform and rally his people to achieve a goal and lead them to work together for the common good of their community. A socially cohesive community will easily respect quarantine rules because they know that the common good is far greater than their individual entitlements, rights, and privileges. A socially cohesive community will have care and concern for the needs of their members, as well as admiration and support to their frontliners.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic is a test of public trust to their government and social cohesion and they can either fall or rise depending on how effective the government responded to it. No matter how carefully planned COVID-19 countermeasures are, when the government is not credible and trustworthy and the people are not united in solidarity for the common good, these will fail and the spread of the virus will be rapid and unabated to the detriment, or even decimation, of the population.

Social cohesion and trust can be promoted after pandemics if government shows that everyone matters and that they must be treated with respect, care and concern, and they can make people understand and accept that everyone matters equally but may not be treated similarly and each person's interest concerns everyone and society. It is also paramount that government and the people recognise that any harm to anyone matters, thus, it must be minimized by ensuring that preservation of life is the priority and number of COVID-19 deaths and patients are minimized. The climate of trust and solidarity must be sustained in times of pandemic through honest, fair, just, and humane governance, just and orderly distribution of scarce resources, goods and services, maintenance of essential public services, and public order and peace. Social cohesion and public trust can also be achieved after pandemics if government's decision-making structure and system, from national to local, are well in place - striking a balance between effective

centralized authority and decentralized decision-making and ensures that pandemic preparedness involves all sectors and remains dynamic.

Strong and trustworthy institutions and social cohesion are a country's "protective equipment" and antibodies against pandemics. The common missing factors explaining failure to counter effectively pandemics is the absence or lack of capable, accountable, and credible government and leaders, and non-cohesive communities. These also explain why some societies are highly at risk to pandemics and others more resilient. Fragility of societies caused by poverty, unemployment, disunity, political polarization, economic and social disparities, inequality in opportunity, lack of education, distrust in government, etc., results to lack of social cohesion. Such can be seen in countries that are performing poorly in pandemic response. In the recent Asia-Pacific region safety countries ranking by the Deep Knowledge group, the Philippines ranked lowest (20th), and one of the reasons mentioned is the inefficiency of government management and severely strained health systems (Hand-Cukierman 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a test for governments and civil societies. The ways that nations respond to the pandemic today and how the society responds to state actions will principally determine their lots and destinies in the next decades or even in the next elections. The pandemic reveals the quality of leaders and people a nation has. Governments that are successful at controlling the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and minimizing fatalities of COVID-19 will enjoy even more social cohesion and public trust. Those that deferred vigorous interventions to control its spread will see greater social stress and distrust, resulting in the paralysation of the public's faith in leaders and government institutions.

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