

What Could a Post-Pandemic World Look Like?

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Introduction

The exact origin of the novel SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, that has caused the COVID-19 pandemic, is unknown at this time, but there are a few viable options. It has been determined to be a zoonotic virus that was created through natural processes (COVID-19 Coronavirus Epidemic Has a Natural Origin, 2020). What the actual processes were though, nobody knows, but the most likely possibilities are the following:

- some distinctive features of the spike protein show that the virus may have become capable of spreading disease while in bats through a process of natural selection then jumped to humans; and,
- other features of the spike protein show that the virus may jumped from a species, like the pangolin, to humans in a form that wasn't spreading a disease then, over the course of time, due to coming in contact with a lot of the human population, it became capable of spreading a deadly disease.

(COVID-19 Coronavirus Epidemic Has a Natural Origin, 2020).

Zoonotic diseases typically become a problem by jumping to humans from other vertebrate animals by direct contact or through water, food, or the environment (Zoonoses, 2020). As a species, we do eat a lot of other animals (bats, monkeys, etc.) cause much environmental damage we can and absolutely should avoid (like cutting down rainforests, polluting oceans, etc.). If we were to limit those actions, then we could begin to see some changes in public health around the world.

The virus became a real global crisis within a few months, and so scientists and researchers started to keep track of what was happening. To date, according to websites that track and monitor the infection, recovery, death and vaccination rates, there have been 126,700,364 infections, 102,162,887 recoveries, 2,779,741 deaths (COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic, 2021), and 113,869,126 vaccinations (Ritchie, Ortiz-Ospina, Beltekian, Mathieu, Hasell, Macdonald, Giattino, Appel, & Roser, 2021). With the vaccinations picking up speed across world, hopefully, we'll be able to start moving past this by next year. But the question is what the world should look like post-pandemic. The way I see it at this point, we can either

- move forward, restore natural environments across the world, and lessen the chance of a similar pandemic occurring; or,
- go back to how life was before the pandemic, increase the chances that it will happen again, and it will be worse next time.

What If We Move Forward

If we want to move forward, once this pandemic is over, various things will need to happen, like restoring natural environments, disincentivizing corporations from polluting, and fully investing in renewable energy. Restoring natural environments (swamps, marshes, forests, etc.) is crucial. As climate change is directly connected to the spreading of diseases, especially where COVID-19 is concerned (Lustgarten, 2020), that means combatting climate change will greatly cut down on how much diseases are spread. It has been noted in the past that the best way to do that is by natural environments around the world (Irfan, 2019).

Disincentivizing corporations from polluting the planet is also very important because the environment needs to be kept clean so it can work as it should. This would primarily be upon the world governments to pass tough laws and regulations then actually enforce them though. When large and multi-national corporations can easily corrupt governments with bribes, that can definitely complicate matters, however. So, it would be important to elect people who understand the situation, how to solve it, and prevent the chance if similar circumstances from happening in the future. Then they can hold the non-democratic countries accountable as well. A few ways to help people like that get elected would be with proportional representation, ranked voting and public funding of elections.

By fully investing in renewable energy, we can cut out a lot of the carbon that we emit. Life-cycle carbon emissions from technology that generates power from fossil fuels are estimated to be at 78 - 110 gCO₂eq kWh⁻¹, whereas energy from solar, wind, and nuclear technology emits 3.5 - 12 gCO₂eq kWh⁻¹. So that is a 74.5 – 98 gCO₂eq kWh⁻¹ difference, which is huge (Pehl, Arvesen, Humpenöder, Popp, Hertwich, & Luderer, 2017).

What If We Go Back

The urge to go back to how life was before the pandemic once the vast majority of the global population is vaccinated will be strong because it would be something that we are familiar with and it would be easy to go back to. Renewable energy is definitely going to overtake fossil fuels in the near future as it makes logical and economical sense for that to happen. Natural environments are also getting restored and protected by governments and non-profit organizations to some degree (Wiggins, 2020), but a lot are also being destroyed (Briggs, 2020). Corporations would still be polluting at high rates (Axelrod, 2019) and the corruption in governments across the world would continue at varying levels (Cohn, Ferris, 2013). This means the chances of COVID-19 mutating into something far worse or another virus jumping species that would be even more deadly would be high.

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