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Guest Editor's Note:

Leadership in a time of need

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This is 2021. And it a New Year like no other. The world's peoples are in turmoil, from Covid-19 to climate disruption, from racial injustice to rising inequalities. The world has revealed more clearly than ever its fragilities. Pandemics are clearly at centre stage. New waves of the virus are being reported every week. UNICEF, the United Nation's agency for children, warns that the future of an entire generation is at risk. Clearly, these are needy times and they call for courage and determination. As Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) wrote: You will never do anything in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honour (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017).

The agency reports that as many as two million children could die in this New Year, 2021. And, there could be an additional 200,000 stillbirths. Also, there is evidence that school closures did little to slow the spread of the virus. They failed to lessen COVID-19 infection rates. But, those closures have caused long term harm through the interruptions in basic services. Those have led to increasing poverty because of the resulting wide scale unemployment especially among lower socioeconomic families (Santora, 2020).

UNICEF warns that the problems facing the world are not just about health emergencies. Millions of people are losing trust in political establishments and institutions. Witness, for example, the current civil unrest in several Asian countries, in Europe, in South America, and the massive unrest in the U.S. which is occurring since that nation's recent presidential election. The pandemic has exposed severe and systematic inequalities both within and between countries and the failure of governments to deal with such problems including the many other crises (Santora, 2020).

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Anthoni Guterres, in an earlier statement, declared 'The (COVID-19) emergency is compounded by many other profound humanitarian crises: conflicts that are continuing or even intensifying; record numbers of people forced to flee their homes, swarms of locusts in Africa and South Asia; looming droughts in southern Africa and Central America; all amid a context of rising geopolitical tensions. In the face of these fragilities, world leaders need to be humble and recognise the viral importance of unity and solidarity' (Guterres, 2020).

Strategies for change. In November, 2020, the World Economic Forum staged a virtual conference in London. The event was entitled '2030 Vision". The focus was 'unlocking the potential opportunity for technology to help make the Global Goals a reality over the next 10 years'. Some 17 global goals had been developed 'to facilitate equal, sustainable and inclusive growth (World Economic Forum, 2020).

The Forum brought together leaders of technology companies, government, civil society and international organisations for the purpose of enlarging networks for solving urgent social and economic problems. (Parker, 2020).

A number of changes were already underway even as the world continues to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. Four examples will be described next. They are illustrative of human ingenuity and the power of collaboration during times of need (Parker, 2020).

One. Working from home had benefited start-ups of all kinds in pre-pandemic times. Start-ups have benefited enormously from their 'head start'. They showed there was no need for expensive offices or inefficient business travel. New markets and new investors could be accessed through a zoom or VooV conference. These so-called start-ups have proved to be innovative, efficient and agile. They have expanded work opportunities for a new generation of tech graduates, for example.

Two. In many places there is a shift to manufacturing locally to meet its own needs due to closures due to COVID-19. Countries thrive when they are the producers of physical products. Conversely, they shrink when they are only the consumers of products produced elsewhere. The GDPs of the 'big' countries like China, Japan, and the U.S. rise and fall based on their manufacturing sectors. It's now seen as imperative that the coronavirus has given countries the impetus to create their own local supply networks. National leaders are thinking differently and taking more control of their own economic activity.

Three. Developing nations have benefited from a surge in international cooperation to strengthen their primary healthcare systems. The virus doesn't respect national borders. More sources are being sought for telemedicine, remote diagnostics, and for training of frontline healthcare workers, for example. Such vital developments should not replace the importance of all jurisdictions to provide the most basic healthcare infrastructure as defined by the World Health Organisation. Also it's an opportunity for governments to support local producers of essential medical supplies and support knowledge transfer from other countries.

Four. It is becoming even more obvious of the link between human health and the health of the planet. This pandemic can underscore the importance of sustainable systems and products. Leaders everywhere can now more easily introduce legislation which focuses protection of resources through recycling and supporting the development of alternative energy sources, for example.

These are only four examples of the rapid and innovative responses to the urgencies facing the world's peoples.

Finally, the Editor-in-Chief and his excellent team, and this writer extend best wishes to all of our readers and to follow public health guidelines in their own countries.

Comments are always appreciated. If you have comments concerning this Editor's Note, or about a particular article, or even the Journal's policies, please send them to jcst2018@rsu.ac.th

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