

Lessons from COVID-19 for KRG

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Authors

Rudaw RC

Abstract

This article is an analytical view of what is happening now in terms of reactions to developments of COVID-19. How to deal with its consequences, government work mechanisms, and taking the utmost precautions toward the danger to the extent of middle and far future. The article is a clear message that contains important proposals for government officials. If they would be taken, there will be an immense achievement.

We are confronted with the true uncertainty of human existence. This pandemic shows us the importance of recognizing the core of all businesses and economies, political parties, and governments namely, to serve human needs and purposes. Thus, the Kurdistan human resource is the precious capital that the KRG should realize and protect it. Therefore, it must first of all focus on three very important issues; Improving Healthcare System, Supporting Agriculture System, and Digitalizing Services and Education System.

We are currently in the midst of a worldwide trial that has changed our lives beyond recognition. It is a challenge on a global level since the Covid-19 pandemic does not respect national boundaries.[\[1\]](#) It has been said that COVID-19 is an unprecedented humanitarian crisis from which there can be no return to the 'old normal'

But it is just as much a challenge on the national level, where many of the policy decisions in response to the pandemic are made, and on the local levels, where people decide on whether to comply with government guidelines or to support one another in times of need. Everyone one of us bears a great responsibility for the health and wellbeing of others.

We are confronted with the true uncertainty of human existence and the true vulnerability of human life. How often have so many of us believed that we are supreme masters of the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic shows us the importance of recognizing the true purpose of all our businesses and economies, our political parties and governments, our local civic associations, and all our other systems: namely, to serve human needs and purposes. This is that we call it the True Fact, and should the governments admit it practically.[\[2\]](#)

Covid-19 forces to confront the most brutally honest and vitally important question: what must be done to overcome this pandemic?

Form such a question and after spending six months midst the pandemic, we have to realize that the new circumstance that this epidemic has brought with itself is various and different challenges for people across the world, which we have to say that it raised different questions as well. Depending on the capabilities and potentiality of governments, people and available resources.

However, we can say that there are two different questions that the governments raise, or they should pose, or at least they should realize that they have become challenges, and they are:

What do we do to control this pandemic and remove its threat? How should we live with the pandemic and mitigate its danger?

Which of the two above questions should the KRG consider as a challenge?

Given the level of scientific and economic progress in the Kurdistan Region specifically and the area in general. Taking into account the nature of the pandemic threat that does not recognize the borders. And the number of infections increases daily, with the limited capabilities of the government, Certainly, the second question is the challenge that the regional government must face, and it is the main question that the political authority in the Kurdistan Region must ask.

In order to answer that question, first of all the government shall know that the COVID-19 pandemic requires us to listen to experts, to unite behind the science and not play politics with people's lives.^[3] This means responding to the challenge at the appropriate scale and treating a crisis like a crisis with the urgency that's needed. This is the time for scholars, not officers. Scholars at all times are the jewel in the crown of people, they are the wealth of nations and states before militants, whatever their abilities and skills.^[4]

Covid-19 highlights the need for vigilance, for new narratives and reformed governance institutions.

When nation states are successful in addressing national challenges, they create national identities and institutions that are compatible with local identities and institutions. Within successful nation states, citizens know when they should cede their individual sovereignty to groups of larger size. And this is the natural consequences if the governments pursued the True Fact method.

We need to recognize that the scale and complexity of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic is unprecedented, encompassing the whole world and almost every aspect of human life. Lack of global leadership, undermining of the WHO and other inadequate global responses have exacerbated the present humanitarian crisis. The COVID-19 Pandemic has called into question many prevailing beliefs and practices, requiring new thinking.

Smart governance is essential to implement appropriate measures at the right time even with access to top notch scientific advice and notification systems and software in place. Timing was crucial during the crisis since a delay in introducing a lockdown can add thousands of deaths.^[5] Science-based political decisions are the only rational and beneficial way to move.

Furthermore, the population is more likely to observe the lockdown rules where public trust in government is high. Where trust is low, police and even military action was required to enforce the lockdown. The latter can, however, trigger a backlash with protesters calling for the population to ignore government measures. Public trust in government will also be essential if new COVID-19 clusters appear and tighter social distancing measures need to be reintroduced.

As for the Kurds, it is known, and history is witness to that, that the Kurds were and still are people under threat of extinction. The international crimes of Genocide and others that have been committed against the Kurds, by the previous or current political authorities in Iraq or elsewhere, are blatant evidence. This highlights the fact of high value, which is that the most valuable capital owned by this people is the people themselves. In other words, the Kurdish human resource is the most valuable capital that the Kurdish political authority should realize and work for its protection.

The Kurdish human resource, people or individuals, is the capital that the Kurdish government must work to protect from erosion and extinction.

We may, unfortunately, go with the saying that during nearly three decades of Kurdish local rule, the political authority has not been able to preserve this capital as it should be. At least from the moral side, in terms of preserving the identity, moral affiliation, and immediate readiness to sacrifice for the sake of the homeland.

And this was the result of a danger that was the result of wrong practices, internal conflicts, civil wars, and acts of

corruption that undermined the pillars of political rule and the Kurdish ideology (Kurdayety) of the Kurdish individual and the Kurdish people in general. whereas public trust in government is low. However, the current danger, and I mean this pandemic, for the Kurds is a double risk for the reasons that were mentioned above on the one hand. On the other hand, the nature of this risk differs through:

The source of danger is an external source, and it is of a nature that does not recognize the international borders, and that this danger is a direct threat to the existence of the Kurdish person, not to his moral structure, but to his physical structure.

And here we are not evaluating the KRG's policy in facing the pandemic, which may not have been at the required level due to the limited resources available to the government in facing the danger and the degree of awareness of the individual and the people in general in taking precautions and measures necessary for protection.

what can we take from the pandemic to tackle the current situation?

The talk here focuses on what the government should do and plan in the long extent to confront such dangers, which it must first of all to focus on three very important things, namely:

- Improving Healthcare System
- Supporting Agriculture System
- Digitalizing Services and Education System

Improving Healthcare System

The pandemic has exposed weaknesses of healthcare systems. In countries where health insurance is tied to employment, individuals have been left without protection when they lost their job during the pandemic. In addition to the hardship this may cause in case of infection, the lack of access to professional treatment can increase the risk of contagion for people close to them, and therefore counteract efforts to control the pandemic.

The total focus and attention to the health emergency are among the most prominent lessons learned from this crisis; It is the primary goal of governments and international institutions. To contain infection, these institutions are working to strengthen healthcare facilities and hospitals, and to ensure the supply of virus prevention tools.

The accumulated experience for the last six months in facing the pandemic, unearthed the fact that the exposition of weaknesses of healthcare systems in non-developed countries, where health insurance is "guaranteed" legally, is more tangible.

For KRG, as the federal constitution of Iraq provided on guarantying health care for all individuals and the health security of the society is guaranteed by the government. The article No.30, First provided on "The State shall guarantee to the individual and the family _ especially children and women _ social and health security, the basic requirements for living a free and decent life,..." and Second " The state shall guarantee social and health security to Iraqis in cases of old age, sickness, employment..." and Article 31 " Every citizen has the right to health care. The state shall maintain public health and provide the means of prevention and treatment..."

The best lesson for KRG from the Covid-19 is freedom from dependency on the abroad in terms of medicine security in its general sense.

The direct impact of this pandemic is reflected on the public policies related to the health sector, either with regard to health structures, training of adequate human resources, scientific research, or the establishment of an advanced pharmaceutical industry capable of responding to national needs in the event of a health emergency.

Strengthening medical cooperation with developed countries, to benefit from their expertise in the field of scientific research, to achieve the maximum possible self-sufficiency in the field of medicine and the medical industry.

For that purpose, KRG has constitutional base without impendent as according to the article 114, Fifth "To formulate public health policy, in cooperation with the regions and governorates that are not organized in a region." This shall be conducted jointly between the federal authorities and regional authorities.

Otherwise, in the case of conflict, the KRG has conduct it independently according to the article 115 of the constitution "...With regard to other powers shared between the federal government and the regional government, priority shall be given to the law of the regions and governorates not organized in a region in case of dispute".

Supporting Agriculture System

The UN had warned that a pandemic would strain global food supply chains. Border closures and disruption in aviation and shipping industries placed countries with few alternative sources at high risk.[\[6\]](#)

The UN also has warned of 'biblical' famine as food security had deteriorated even before COVID-19, for example, due to locust plagues in Africa and wars in Syria and Yemen. Lockdowns are affecting planting, harvesting and movement of food and strained societal cohesion, and put at risk individuals' mental health and, for many, personal safety. [\[7\]](#)

The United Nations (UN) and other bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have noted that the pandemic will increase inequality globally and risk a global economic depression _ which it seems it is already underway. An additional 8% of the world's population are predicted to fall into poverty. According to the World Bank 2019, the current 'global wave of debt is largest, fastest in 50 years.[\[8\]](#)

This will have important implications for what happens as we emerge from the pandemic. Normally, crises are associated with unemployed labor and excess productive capacity, making it relatively easy to restart economies by boosting demand. But now, industries cannot easily be restarted until the medical crisis is over.

Besides direct socio-economic impacts of the health crisis, the pandemic will affect developing countries through global supply chain disruptions, tourism industry collapse, commodity price falls, falls in remittances by migrants, capital flights and foreign investment decline. Susceptibility to the pandemic is heightened by poor nutrition and inadequate housing infrastructure. Food security is a major issue in remote communities under lockdown.

The pandemic has disrupted the reliance of KRG on federal government fund, Oil revenue, and custom income for economic self-sufficiency. Then the economic, social, and political rift in Kurdistan Region is destined to worsen, thereby jeopardizing the Kurds entity.

So, there is a need to plan very carefully for the post pandemic recovery. The COVID-19 events also expose the irresponsibility of government following a dependency ideology, in allowing the decline of entire industrial sectors due to corruption practices.

A return to the concept of agriculture sector is vital for recovery policies to be effective in the long run. The importance of building up agriculture sector, which atomistic market processes are incapable of bringing about, consists in the fact that COVID-19 type events are likely to be repeated in the coming years and decades.

Thus, maintaining food security by support agriculture sector, shall remain one of the KRG's priorities and the specialist in this field should present their proposal.

Digitalizing Government Services and Education System

The COVID-19 pandemic initiated an extensive, sudden and dramatic digital transformation in the society. The pandemic forced us to take an extraordinary digital leap in our everyday life and practices, including our children and their education. In a flash, their education was transformed from a traditional classroom practice to a virtual, digitalized one. This required significant adjustments not only from children and their teachers, but also from their families, school administration and the entire society.^[9]

Another lesson I think we have benefited internally from the crisis is that the queues must end irreversibly, and indeed a large number of state agencies have succeeded in providing services online. Through a simple number of steps and without leaving your home, you can today extract official documents without even leaving your place.

The culture of being served online must be rooted in the minds of the citizen, and in the mentality and formation of the various service providers. The time wasted in going to this or that directory can be invested in something else.

We may have been delaying some time in activating virtual education, but it is better to come late than not, and students and parents must be well aware that education today is no longer limited to indoctrination or classroom walls, and that there are technological means and knowledge banks that must be invested in developing the ability of our children to learn creative thinking.

The KRG should also be more active in preparing the society for digital transformation. We claim to be the experts in understanding and facilitating digital transformation in industry and public sector organizations, while KRG should start to approach digital transformation of education as one of its core concerns, joining forces with educational sciences.

For that purpose, KRG has constitutional base without impendent as according to the article 34, First "Education is a fundamental factor for the progress of society and is a right guaranteed by the state...", Second "Free education in all its stages is a right for all Iraqis ", Third " The State shall encourage scientific research for peaceful purposes that serve humanity and shall support", and Fourth "Private and public education shall be guaranteed, and this shall be regulated by law." And according to the article 114, This shall be conducted jointly between the federal authorities and regional authorities. Otherwise, in the case of conflict, the KRG has conduct it independently according to the article 115 of the constitution.

This requires much more than mere adoption of digital tools in teaching practices. This requires strategic thinking, awareness of technology potential, ability to envision alternative future and to reflect on them as well as change management skills and competences.

Given the globalized nature of our crises, solutions for future epidemics and pandemics will require better cooperation between leaders in government as well as in public and private organizations. and this is the lesson that we as Kurds must take into the post-Covid-19 world.

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