



# Hope-19

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The next generation of citizen diplomats will have to put national and international communities on even humanitarian footing in the future if the world is to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. We live in an increasingly international world. This, of course, is part of the problem of a pandemic: a highly contagious world-wide virus may mutate and spread very rapidly, making it hard to eradicate or control.

One of the great successes illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic is the development of vaccines in a very short period of time to combat the pandemic. At least eleven different vaccines have been developed internationally, and more than 200 other vaccine candidates are in development.

Yet even in the midst of this world-wide technological achievement, the pandemic shines the light on the inequality that exists between poor and rich countries. Relatively rich nations like the United States, Russia and China, and some Northern European countries raced to develop vaccines. Those countries generally use the vaccines for their own populations first – blurring the lines between health equity and nationalism. Poorer or less technologically advanced countries are left in the position of waiting for production to ramp up until global demand can be satisfied, or must rely on the diplomatic generosity of wealthy nations to share vaccine supplies.

The result of this is vaccine diplomacy between the haves and have-nots. Vaccines are used as a tool by wealthy or technologically countries seeking to curry favor with poorer countries. While vaccines may not necessarily be distributed as a “quid pro quo,” it is clear that the race to be the first to develop vaccines so they could be distributed and/or sold internationally was a matter of diplomatic priority for some nations, like Russia for example, which approved its vaccine, Sputnik V, before phase III trials had even begun. Vaccine distribution has become a means of strategic international relationship building.

Traditional economic theory holds that every person acts rationally in his or her best interests. Vaccine diplomacy illustrates that vaccination development and international distribution to poorer countries is not wholly a humanitarian exercise, as it should be. Wealthy or technologically advanced countries acting rationally in their best interest will focus on distributing vaccines to their neighbor countries or to countries that offer strategic or natural resource advantages, if not monetary compensation.

If humanity is truly going to find hope in the midst of this pandemic, then future diplomats should dedicate themselves to the humanitarian distribution of vaccines to populations based on need and risk for the disease. Vaccine distribution world-wide should be premised upon the strategic eradication or prevention of the disease in all populations – not just in wealthy countries, or in the wealthiest subsegments of populations within a given country.

If the world is to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, then the next generation of citizen diplomats must find a way to achieve both domestic and international vaccine equity as a means to foster an international resolution to the pandemic. Otherwise, the world may not recover.