



# COVID-19 and Social Protection

A Study in Human Resilience  
and Social Solidarity

*Edited by* Steven Ratuva · Tara Ross ·  
Yvonne Crichton-Hill · Arindam Basu ·  
Patrick Vakaoti · Rosemarie Martin-Neuninger



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# A Replay of the *War of the Worlds*? COVID-19 and Social Protection

*Steven Ratuva*

## INTRODUCTION

Like Martians invading Earth in the book, *The War of the Worlds*, COVID-19 took the world by storm in unprecedented ways, causing havoc and pandemonium in its path of destruction. However, the ironic twist in H. G. Wells' story is that the invasion from outer space was defeated, not by human technological genius, but by pathogens—by infectious micro-organisms, much like COVID-19. Of course, the major difference between COVID-19 and *The War of the Worlds* is that the latter was fiction, a figment of human imagination, while the former is not. The current pandemic is a real nightmare, it is happening, it maims, kills, paralyzes economies and causes social chaos. Humanity has never seen anything so globally disruptive.

However, there is hope as human imagination, humanity's most powerful transformative tool, will eventually triumph, whether in the

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form of vaccination (which, admittedly, brings new problems of inequality in terms of procurement, costs, logistics and coverage across countries, adding to the layers of problems) or the many stories of people using their powers of innovation and empathy to confront the pandemic and its consequences and transform lives and communities. So herein is a narrative both of tragedy and hope. This is what the present book is about. It is the story of the capacity of human agency to overcome adversity such as COVID-19 by building up resilience through innovative means of survival.

A pandemic is defined as an epidemic that has become worldwide in the extent of its contagion, across national boundaries and infecting a large number of people in many countries (Kelly 2011: 540). Pandemics are not new. Since the days of hunters and gatherers, communicable diseases had been rife and contributed to transforming the human capacity to respond to calamities. Some of the earliest recorded pandemics included one that was said to have infected Athens in AD 430, killing two-thirds of the population. The Antonine plague from AD 165 to AD 180 swept across the Roman Empire, even killing a Roman Emperor, Lucius Verus (McNeill 1976). Others included the Cyprian plague of AD 250 and the Justinian plague of AD 541, as well as the leprosy pandemic in Europe in the eleventh century. The great plague of London in 1665 was followed by a series of pandemics in the 1800s such as the first cholera pandemic of 1865, the third plague pandemic of 1855 and the Russian flu of 1889. In the twentieth century, a number of pandemics were prominent, including the Spanish flu of 1918, the Asian flu of 1957 and HIV/AIDS, which started in 1981, and in this century, we faced SARS in 2003 and now the current COVID-19 pandemic (Cartwright and Biddins 2020). Colonialism was also responsible for spreading various types of pandemic to colonized populations, and perhaps the most deadly of these saw the death of about 56 million Native Americans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by diseases introduced by Spanish colonizers. In 1875, a measles pandemic that originated in Australia killed a total of 40,000 people in Fiji, about a third of the population. Significant numbers of colonized populations in Africa, Asia and the Pacific were decimated as a result of the Spanish flu and other diseases introduced from Europe.

Compared to former pandemics, COVID-19 is unprecedented both in terms of its global scale and impact. Tens of millions of people have been infected, and the numbers keep rising, hundreds of thousands have been killed, borders have been closed and economies paralyzed, causing untold

misery for individuals, families and communities across the globe (Pawar 2020). One of the most immediate forms of response has been the implementation of social protection programmes, which include wage subsidy intervention by the government, food distribution, cash transfer and a whole range of other community-focused services that have been put in place by a range of players such as states, international organizations, civil society organizations and community organizations (Diwakar 2020; ILO 2020a). The speed with which COVID-19 became globalized is a result of extensive global interconnectedness through air travel. It is also the only pandemic to have infected all regions of the world at once. In an era of virtual communication, news and images of death and destruction reached other parts of the world in real time and people could make comparative assessments of their situation in relation to others. For once, all countries in the world became united in their common consciousness about a common threat, but different countries, for different reasons, utilized different approaches to address the pandemic.

This book has been written while the COVID-19 pandemic is still prevalent and the rate of infection is still increasing globally, and before the mass rollout of potentially game-changing vaccination. The book relates to the way local communities have devised ways of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic through various means of social protection and social solidarity economies. It examines through case studies and alternative modes of analysis the intersection between social protection and the social solidarity economy, particularly in relation to community-based responses to COVID-19.

## COVID-19 AND THE CRISIS OF NEOLIBERALISM: RETHINKING ALTERNATIVES

In 2019, an international team of medical experts, led by the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security (JHU) and The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) developed the Global Health Index (GHI), which amongst other things, ranked countries according to their levels of preparedness for pandemics (NTI et al. 2020). Touted as a ‘ground-breaking index’ by the authors themselves, the GHI ranked the United States (US) as number one, the United Kingdom as number two and the Netherlands as number three. This index suddenly became obsolete and a source of embarrassment when COVID-19 struck and revealed the first three ranked countries in the

GHI as amongst the worst performing in terms of COVID-19 responses, where countries in Africa, which were ranked very low in the index, were some of the highest performers. It was a clear case of epistemological incongruence between abstract academic metrification and social reality. The GHI was based largely on medical variables and failed to capture the wider socio-economic, cultural and political environment that impacts on health conditions, human behaviour, policy outcomes and responses.

There are some important lessons here. Firstly, health issues should not be studied in isolation within the confinements of biological paradigms, but rather framed within broader interdisciplinary approaches that can better account for the interconnectedness between health and social conditions. The second issue is more methodological and relates to how the choice of inappropriate variables for the purpose of metrification could impact the outcomes. The GHI analysis did not consider significant social variables such as inequality, racism, ideology and political leadership, which were defining indicators in pushing the US down as the number six worst performer in the world as far as COVID-19 is concerned, a far cry from the number one status accorded by the GHI ranking. The point here is that while framing an index or a metricized algorithm may make sense in terms of providing a quantified snapshot of a situation at a particular point in time, it does not necessarily capture the subjective sentiments, intents and implicit biases of people. These lessons should also be guiding lights for how we understand social protection and the need to situate it in a changing social context, unequal social structure, as well as ideological and political context.

Often defined as programmes to address the situation of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in society (Ratuvu 2014), social protection has gone through significant policy reviews and academic debates about what it should be and what it should focus on. Part of the reason for this has to do with widespread neoliberal reforms driven by privatization, commodification and financialization of public goods, which have impacted wellbeing policy framing and implementation. The lessons of COVID-19 and the inability of neoliberal health systems to respond effectively, as we saw earlier in the case of the US, are compelling reasons as to why social protection needs to be redefined not in terms of the market imperatives that see social protection as a private commodity, but as a public good that serves human wellbeing first and foremost (Lazonick and O'Sullivan 2000). The neoliberal economic system has created an unequal and often racialized structure, which is reflected in disparity in

access to health and social insurance and health programmes that often favour the interests of pharmaceutical and insurance corporations (Viana and Silva 2018).

A World Health Organization (WHO) study has shown that although there has been a growth in universal health coverage, inequality still remains as a major obstacle, with predominantly poor people having minimal or no access (WHO 2017). The neoliberal prescriptions in many countries have had a negative impact on social protection in many regions of the world, especially those targeted towards children (ILO 2020b). The disparities are between and within countries (van Doorslaer and Koolman 2004). The 2008 global crisis showed the fragility of the market economy and the need to rethink how communities can develop resilience (Mirowski 2013).

How we think about social protection as a form of direct assistance in times of crisis needs to be beyond just health and should incorporate other aspects such as development of opportunities and capacity in the areas of poverty, education, employment and other aspects of wellbeing (Walsham et al. 2019). Social protection needs to be framed in a holistic manner that includes not just protection, but also prevention, capacity building and transformation (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004).

There should also be a realization that there are diverse types of organizations such as multilateral, bilateral and private institutions, which frame social protection according to their specific interests and not just for universal human wellbeing (Waring et al. 2013). The ILO, whose mandate is to look after workers' rights, tends to be oriented towards labour market conditions and their impact on employees (ILO 2012). By contrast, the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2011), which are global financial institutions driving austerity-based neoliberal economic reforms, tend to be involved in a rather uncomfortable balancing act between market-based principles and equity creation (Holmes and Jones 2009). The ADB has developed a Social Protection Index (SPI) to measure the depth and coverage of social protection using four variables: Social Protection Expenditure (SPEXP), Social Protection Coverage (SPCOV), Social Protection Distribution (SPDIST) and Social Protection Impact (SPIMP) (McKinley 2013).

The problem with the ADB system is that it does not take community-based and indigenous social protection systems into consideration, nor does it consider issues of systemic inequality and unequal access based on class, ethnicity and gender. This ideological and cultural bias

is subconsciously embedded in the SPI formula, and while it may have policy value for the ADB, it does not fully reflect the intertwined and multi-dimensional complexities of culture, politics, economics and health. In a similar way, the framework used by the WB associates social protection with ‘managing social risk’ that might otherwise impact the market (Heltberg et al. 2008). The ADB and the WB’s framing of social protection has been criticized for a parochial focus on the formal sector and formally employed people and for overlooking the significance of social protection in the community, including indigenous forms of social protection (Ratuva 2010). Beckert (2020: 319–320) takes the criticism further by stating that the optimism for growth and wealth promoted by financial institutions and the role of social protection as a means of market support is ‘illusory’ to say the least. The neoliberal assumption that social protection is part of the market’s self-regulatory mechanism in levelling any anomalies (Hathaway 2020; Viana and Silva 2018) overlooks the pervasive power differentials, contradictions and inequalities in the market, including the specific rationale behind social protection (McCord 2009; Hickey 2007). To others, social protection, like any other economic activity, can be used to leverage state interests and domination (Darcy 2004; Harvey 2009; Harvey and Holmes 2007).

Moreover, it needs stressing that market-based social protection strategies vary considerably, ranging from the highly privatized system of health, education and other state services in the US to more state-based systems as in some European countries (Fullman et al. 2018). Despite its neoliberal economic strategy, Aotearoa New Zealand still maintains a state-subsidized and efficient public health system, and this is just one of the reasons for the country’s commendable response to COVID-19. The contradiction between the idea of health as a social good and health as a private good continues to be a major dilemma in social protection (Viana and Silva 2018).

The call for more people-focused social protection is based on the principle of inclusivity and interconnections that take into consideration issues such as gender disparity, racism, conflict and other social issues at the family and community levels (Holmes and Jones 2009). In this regard, the idea of ‘anticipatory’ (preventive) and ‘transformative’ social protection proposed by Waring et al. (2013) is an alternative view that considers a human rights and gender-based perspective. This alternative intersects with the SSE, which has been growing in reach and relevance as a result of COVID-19. The lessons of the 2008 global crisis having now



been replicated, especially in terms of how communities had to fall back on community-based social protection systems, there has been renewed interest in the search for alternative development strategies by development experts and international aid agencies (Slater and McCord 2009; Davies and McGregor 2009; Szreter 2009; Parks and Abbott 2009). To Szreter (2009: 290), the basis of this community-based social protection should be the ‘endowment of mutually respecting and trusting relationships’ and ‘the quality of the set of relationships of a social group’. This needs to be anchored in local culture and framed by a sense of local space (Schiller and de Wet 2019). An important aspect of this is empowered relationships with indigenous cultures (Schiller and de Wet 2019). The relationship between community-based social protection and the SSE should be a basis for creating resilience and sustainability (Barrientos and Hinojosa-Valencia 2009; Devereux and Cipryk 2009; Köhler et al. 2009). Coupled with this is the need to allocate more power, capacity and resources to local communities (Norton et al. 2001; Shepherd et al. 2004).

## THE SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY ALTERNATIVE

COVID-19 has demonstrated the fragility of the market system which because of its narrow focus on private profit privileges a minority, because of its dependence on a life-long debt system ties people to the inescapable dictates of market imperatives, and because of its particular culture determines human identity and capacity by one’s market value and relevance (Saad-Filho 2020). To sustain their paralyzed economies, states had to intervene to rescue corporations from collapse through wage subsidy and other strategies, and in countries where the capacity of the state was limited, people had to fend for themselves in the face of impending calamity (Roubini 2020). Many people in formal employment who, for most of their lives, relied on the capitalist mode of production for survival had to look for alternatives either by reinventing new community-based systems of economic survival or reverting to indigenous modes of survival. These constitute what is known as the social and solidarity economy (SSE), an alternative that has been promoted by the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE), and which we will discuss in more detail below (UNTFSSSE 2017, 2020).

The SSE has been part of many indigenous and local communities for a long time, and has been studied by sociologists and anthropologists,

and latterly gained significance in policy research (Rafaelli 2017). While different definitions have been used by scholars over the years, the need to provide a unified, inclusive and representative definition led to this 2009 International Labour Organization (ILO) conference framing of SSE as a:

...concept designating enterprises and organizations, in particular cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises, which have the specific feature of producing goods, services and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity.

While this definition was aimed at ‘re-balancing economic, social and environmental objectives’, it is only relevant to the semi-market and formal economy and still does not capture the realities of indigenous economies.

A significant aspect of the SSE is its focus on human wellbeing and ethics, rather than profit, which makes SSE-based strategies, policies and programmes increasingly popular in the worldwide response to worsening poverty, environmental degradation and climate change as a result of human activities (Rafaelli 2017). Also important is the way SSE draws the power of its meaning and moral force from people’s histories, local culture and community worldviews as an alternative paradigm to neoliberal capitalism and some of its predatory practices (Laville 2010). For a number of years, international organizations such as the United National Development Program and the ILO, civil society organizations, scholars and grassroots communities themselves have joined hands to promote its use and significance in countries in the Global South. The UNTFSSSE was set up in 2013 in response to the demands for greater involvement by international agencies to help mainstream the SSE into development and wellbeing programmes during the Rio+20 summit in June 2012. Some United Nations (UN) Member States have gone as far as forming an International Leading Group on Social and Solidarity Economy (ILGSSE) to promote the SSE as part of the global mainstream development component. However, despite these high-level global initiatives, there is still a large gap in terms of research and theorizing about the SSE in the Global South. The use of ‘progressive’ models from Western countries has continued to dominate the SSE narrative, but these may not necessarily be appropriate for marginalized communities in the Global South (Martinez et al. 2019: 1).

The link between the SSE and social protection also needs revisiting, especially given the ways in which COVID-19 has stimulated and inspired SSE and social protection strategies. For instance, reliance on kinship-based barter systems, which is an example of indigenous forms of social protection (as shown in Chapter 11), can be central to the SSE; examples in other chapters further demonstrate the synergies between the two concepts. The next section focuses more on alternative forms of social protection and how social protection is linked to the SSE in the broader framing of alternative wellbeing approaches in the context of COVID-19.

## THE CHAPTERS

The COVID-19 crisis should be a basis for a more innovative look at interdisciplinary and integrated social protection approaches simultaneously to address climate change, inequality, health and other forms of wellbeing in a creatively adaptive and transformative way. This is an approach that has been suggested earlier by some scholars as a way of making social protection more connected with the SSE, more transformative and relevant to local realities (Davies et al. 2008; Raworth 2007; Heltberg et al. 2008). The chapters in the book attempt to do justice to this in various ways. They are configured to ensure that they are engaged in a process of interdisciplinary dialogue rather than being insulated from each other, to broaden and deepen the analysis and debates on COVID-19 and social protection. By bringing together chapters written by experts in different fields, the book also provides a trans-boundary space where authors share their research findings and analysis, unhindered by the limitations of artificial disciplinary lines. The desire to expand our understanding of the whole of society impact of COVID-19 in the areas of health, economy, social relations, politics, technology, media, culture and psychology has compelled us to think broadly and deeply about taking an inclusive, equity-based, people-centred, wellbeing-framed and participatory mode of understanding the pandemic, its consequences and different responses to it.

In Chapter 2, Arin Basu provides a view of social protection and social determinants of health in relation to COVID-19 and related disasters from an epidemiological perspective. Health of populations and individual health statuses are influenced by social position, and social situations determine the health of people. In this sense, health is not only a ‘state’, but also a resource that needs to be nurtured over people’s lifetimes.

Poverty, or lack of material resources, impacts health adversely and in particular, may result in infectious diseases as people are forced to live in damp, crowded conditions. This is particularly relevant in the face of outbreaks of diseases that can shut down economies and force people into poverty where such conditions are exacerbated. The COVID-19 viral outbreak, the ongoing worldwide pandemic is a case in point. This has resulted in widespread lockdowns in different countries. While lockdown is used as a containment measure to control the spread of the virus and limit viral infection, it also has the downstream effect of shutting down parts of or whole economies, thus leading to further worsening of poverty and social distress. The chapter argues for the strengthening of social protection measures to protect vulnerable members of society from poverty-related adverse life events and circumstances. The chapter examines social protection policies and develops models to address what may happen and what needs to be done to strengthen social protection systems for securing the health and wellbeing of vulnerable populations in the face of unforeseen phenomena such as COVID-19.

In Chapter 3, Yvonne Crichton-Hill examines the impact of lockdown on family violence and discusses some of the relevant social protection approaches to address these. While lockdown was a ‘scientific’ national strategy to combat the spread of the infection, the consequences on some families were dramatic as perpetrators of family violence were locked together with victims, and high levels of stress and trauma simply escalated the violence in significant ways. The chapter explores the impact of lockdown measures on the occurrence of child abuse, intimate partner violence and elder abuse, social protection responses to family violence and considerations for an integrated social protection system.

Another consequence of COVID-19 was food insecurity as businesses closed and people lost their jobs and sources of income and thus their ability to buy food. In Chapter 4, Rosemarie Martin discusses the impacts of COVID-19 on food security by looking at emergency food systems in the form of food banks and policy responses. The pandemic exacerbated food insecurity amongst vulnerable groups, and those who lost employment were faced with the stark reality of reduced access to food and hunger. Many who previously did not need food aid joined food bank queues for the first time (in their thousands). This went hand in hand with increasing poverty and marginalization. While food banks may be a temporary measure, they do provide an immediate response to people’s

wellbeing as they rehabilitate themselves and look for other opportunities. For the unskilled and marginal groups and individuals, food banks have become part of their daily survival culture. The chapter also provides recommendations to improve food banks, which require holistic solutions and best practices. This includes the critical role of governments to support a diversity of food and social protection initiatives, reducing food insecurity by promoting food resilience and respecting food sovereignty.

Amongst the most affected social categories of people are young people. This is discussed by Patrick Vakaoti in Chapter 5. Since the pandemic, young people globally have been referred to as the ‘lockdown generation’. This chapter talks about young people and the impact of the pandemic on tertiary education, work and wellbeing and the role of social protection mechanisms in addressing youth issues. The chapter builds on a piece in *The Big Q* titled ‘How are young tertiary students that work faring in the wake of COVID-19?’ written by the author himself and draws extensively from secondary sources, particularly academic blog posts and rapid assessment reports by various international agencies like the ILO and the ADB.

COVID-19 demonstrated how readily people can now share information through global interconnections of media networks and virtual modes of communication. It also underscored disparities in the way information is shared, which are reflective of deeper systemic inequalities within society. This is an issue explored by Tara Ross in Chapter 6 in which she critically examines communication inequalities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the role that media and digital technologies might play in a recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the lack of access to digital and media technologies often faced by those socio-economically disadvantaged groups at greater risk of health problems from COVID-19. Media paywalls, for instance, exclude poorer communities from getting the most accurate health-related news and information, potentially making them more susceptible to misinformation and exacerbating their vulnerability in a health crisis. Contact tracing applications deployed by health agencies do not work for those who cannot afford or use a smartphone, while health information distributed through digital portals does not reach those who are digitally excluded. Given these challenges are likely to become more pronounced as the pandemic continues, it is vital that barriers to digital and media technologies are urgently addressed.

The impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous communities has been a major concern, especially because of the prior conditions of inequality and deprivation many have been subjected to through colonialism and even in the post-colonial era. Indigenous people are amongst the most infected groups because of their disadvantaged social conditions. This is an issue raised in Chapter 7 by a team of researchers consisting of Teena Henderson, Joseph Martin, Lori Whiteman, Richard Manning, Jon Reyhner and Larry Steeves. The chapter examines the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous community resilience and schooling in New Zealand, the US and Canada. It revolves around three autoethnographies that recount experiences of indigenous peoples from Aotearoa New Zealand, the US and Canada. The first is an autoethnographic account by Teena Henderson, a Ngāi Tahu (Māori) academic from the University of Canterbury (Christchurch, New Zealand). Teena reflects on her tribe's experiences to suggest it must remain resilient and seek to be 'heard' by its Treaty partner (the Crown/New Zealand Government). This is followed by Joseph (Joe) Martin, a Navajo academic (Northern Arizona University) who shares his perspective and those of his close colleagues regarding significant challenges currently facing Navajo Nation leaders, administrators, teachers, parents and learners. Finally, Lori Whiteman (Dakota/Anishinabe; Treaty Education Alliance Executive Director) shares her concerns from rural Saskatchewan, particularly as they relate to the concepts of ambiguous loss and community resilience. The authors then combine as a full team to relate the key recurring themes that emerge from these narratives to international literature. This highlights the unique challenges and shared experiences facing many indigenous communities around the world, particularly those living in remote/rural areas.

The impact of COVID-19 on the elderly has been a major concern in many countries because of their vulnerability to infection as manifested by the fact that many rest homes became hotspots for the virus. Nii-K Plange examines the relationship between ageing, vulnerability and COVID-19 in Chapter 8. This chapter explores the challenges of the ageing populations in Pacific Island countries and their dependency on traditional family relations, despite the general shrinking of resources, including of able-bodied family members and how this presents a crisis of livelihood for ageing parents. In Fiji, government social protection schemes have proven inadequate, and this has opened up spaces for the resurgence of charity, reciprocity and the 'moral economy' as enduring Pacific values. Where

then does social protection go from here? This is the question that the chapter tries to address.

The poor are amongst the most vulnerable to COVID-19 because of the way in which their conditions are exacerbated by the pandemic. In Chapter 9, Jovanie Camacho Espesor provides an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the poor in the Philippines and some of the country's social protection approaches. The Philippines has the highest number of COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia. This chapter aims to explain the nature of vertical engagements of the national and local governments in the provision of social protection for the poor in the Philippines. The COVID-19 crisis has undeniably generated major economic repercussions that gravely affected disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, particularly ordinary workers. The Philippines national government takes the lead in managing the COVID-19 crisis and aiding the poor to cope with the adverse impacts of the pandemic. The chapter examines some key social protection programmes of the national and sub-national governments in the Philippines that are designed to manage and mitigate the detrimental socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It argues that the pandemic has induced the Philippines government to reinforce its existing social protection architecture through the establishment of additional social security guarantees, especially for the poor.

In Chapter 10, Matthew Scobie examines how the notion of accountability as a form of cultural capital can be utilized as a part of responses to the pandemic. While the conventional economic effects of COVID-19 within the global capitalist economy are and will continue to be devastating, in Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori economies and responses have potential for imagining and implementing alternative futures. This chapter explores the potential for scaling out these economies and responses based on present practices and future possibilities, with a focus on the concept of accountability. The chapter first explores pre-colonial accountability structures by following Ngāi Tahu, Māori and indigenous thought and practice. This is to outline the original instructions of accountability, which Scobie discusses in terms of grounded accountability. The chapter briefly explores historical and contemporary perspectives on mutual aid to acknowledge the parallels between grounded accountability and mutual aid and then uses this framework to examine contemporary pandemic responses and future possibilities. The chapter then asks a number of guiding questions for future research and practice.

The paralysis of the market economy meant that for many, new alternative modes of survival that are resilient and sustainable had to be reinvented. In this aspect, many Pacific communities had to fall back on indigenous social solidarity economies, a form of which is direct reciprocity, commonly known as bartering. In Chapter 11, Glen Finau and Romitesh Kant provide an analysis of bartering as a form of resilience building during COVID-19, focusing on Fiji. With an ailing economy, lack of liquidity and inadequate government support, one would think that this would push Fijians into a situation of economic despair, increased crime and potential mass revolt. However, this has been far from the case. One of the most interesting developments in Fiji during COVID-19 has been the emergence of a barter economy facilitated by social media. The Barter for Better Fiji (BFBF) initiative is a Facebook page that was created by three Fijian women to help individuals in Fiji access essential goods such as groceries by bartering for other goods and services. The page has become a national and regional phenomenon, with outgrowths of the page also being created in other Pacific Island countries and in major economies with large Pacific Island communities. This chapter explores the re-emergence of Fiji's barter economy as an alternative form of community-based and internet-mediated social protection during the COVID-19 crisis.

Chapter 12 also provides a discussion of community responses to COVID-19, focusing on West Papuan students' responses to educational and economic challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors, Jhon Urasti Blesia, Efraim Lokden and Renny Sulelino provide an analysis of the interrelated pressures facing West Papuan students undertaking online learning while facing strains on their livelihoods during the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter examines the impacts of the local government's health policy of increased social restrictions and educational institutions' termination of face-to-face learning interactions for West Papuan students. It presents the accounts of nine indigenous students enrolled at the local public university regarding their learning experiences and economic challenges. The chapter examines the difficulties faced by students in adapting to new learning methods, the lack of learning facilities and support and challenges from unclear communication of their learning activities. Students were also challenged by economic issues and the impacts of the pandemic on their families, communities and regional development. Besides the students' own efforts, the government,



the university and the church have all contributed to addressing these challenges.

The responses to the pandemic by countries differed considerably with many industrialized economies struggling to come to terms with the unfolding calamity. The US is one of those countries whose response capacity has been criticized for being chaotic and unbecoming of a political, economic and technological superpower. Jeffery Willis provides an analysis of this in Chapter 13, focusing on the response of the United States Federal Government to the coronavirus crisis, in particular, the narrative constructed by Donald J. Trump. Since first coming to the attention of the global public in January 2020, few countries in the world have been as severely impacted by the novel coronavirus as the US. Though it holds just four percent of the world's total population, as of mid-2020, the US leads the world with a quarter of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths. Despite this dire situation, the administration of former President Trump has frequently downplayed the severity of the virus, and Trump himself has often relayed misinformation to the American public both about the virus itself and his administration's response to it. According to the author, independent analysis has ranked the US last in 'fact-based communications' about the coronavirus when compared to other nations with advanced economies. This chapter provides a chronological overview of how the coronavirus pandemic has unfolded in the US through to September 2020, with a particular focus on the various comments made by President Trump. By drawing on Trump's many public statements, the chapter pieces together the narrative that Trump has constructed about the coronavirus crisis and examines that narrative in light of the broader public health response of the US Federal Government to the pandemic. It argues that Trump's narrative has been erratic, divisive and misleading and that this, combined with a chaotic federal response to the crisis, has undermined public health in the US.

Mobilizing various forms of social capital to consolidate resilience is the subject of Chapter 14 by David Fielding and Stephen Knowles. Aotearoa New Zealand's Alert Level Four lockdown was one of the strictest in the world. The vast majority of New Zealanders not only approved of the restrictions, but also abided by them. The chapter argues that in a democratic society like New Zealand, it would not have been possible for the restrictions to be enforced without there being a high degree of social capital. It compares New Zealand's level of social capital to that of other countries and discusses why New Zealand having high social capital

has been important in the fight against COVID-19. It also discusses some lessons from behavioural economics about the conditions under which strict lockdowns become more difficult to enforce, the longer the restrictions are in place.

The vulnerability of children to COVID-19 has been a major issue primarily because of their perceived vulnerability. In Chapter 15, Litea Meo-Sewabu examines the vulnerability of children in Fiji to the impact of COVID-19. The chapter focuses on two key questions. First, what makes children so vulnerable in the Fiji context? Second what are the social protection issues for children in Fiji? Both questions are explored in the context of COVID-19. Elements of child protection and social protection are identified and explored in the context of how children are socialized as Fijians and within the *Vanua* (the traditional cultural establishment). The discussion focuses on issues related to the family web of relationships and networks within the *Vanua*, which can have both positive and negative impacts for vulnerable children. The chapter further explores the contributions, the re-emergence and the reinforcement of the community-based economy, which provides the basis for social protection in the context of the *Vanua*. The chapter explores these community-based networks that have linked people together, as well as provided everyday citizens the opportunity to be of assistance to the most vulnerable in the community.

## CONCLUSION: SOME FINAL WORDS

Despite their technological advancement, the Martians in *The War of the Worlds* were ignorant of bacteria on planet Earth, and this was their main downfall as they were eliminated by virus-like creatures. The difference here with COVID-19 is that humans may once again be in control after the rollout of vaccination. However, this has not completely solved the problems because the same issues that worsened the pandemic such as inequality, self-interest and ignorance are still prevalent. Pharmaceutical corporations and other privateers have positioned themselves to make a ‘killing’ from the vaccines, and governments have used it as a means of vaccine nationalism as a way of promoting their respective global geopolitical standing. Despite this, there are some glimmers of hope because, as the book shows, there are community-based initiatives that rely fundamentally on and emphasize the human capacities to cooperate, transform, sustain and build resilience. Indigenous means of responses and resilience,

which have sustained communities for ages have once again found relevance in a world dominated by failing neoliberal structures, norms and behaviours.

COVID-19 has caused untold destruction and misery. What started off as a health issue expanded and deepened into a society-wide tragedy, which enveloped every aspect of human existence, including the economy, food security, productivity, inequality, human rights, social relationships, political stability, psychological conditions, communication, education, health and our own sense of identity. The book examines just a small portion of this bigger, interrelated reality, and in a way, it is a work in progress project because the pandemic is still peaking in some countries such as the US, despite promises of the vaccine.

This is one of the first edited books in the social sciences to be written about COVID-19. It is written as snapshot assessment of the pandemic in its early stages, and with the understanding that the issues of social protection and the SSE are long term and both precede and outlive COVID-19. As such, the plan is to produce a follow-up publication that both reassesses the pandemic from a more distant vantage point and reassesses social protection and SSE in a post-COVID-19 environment.

The book also aims to encourage further debates about social protection and the SSE at a time when neoliberal market imperatives are still prominent in defining the norms of economic and social life. It provides a space for the voices of ordinary people to be heard and appreciated, not as irritants that undermine the march of progress as is often assumed by neoliberal ideologues, but as expressions of humanity urging us all to look for alternatives that call for equity and justice in a world where only a few wield power and wealth disproportionate to their size.

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