



ISRM

CORONAVIRUS  
**CAMPFIRE REPORT**

PART 1: **THE FIRST WAVE: MARCH - MAY 2020**

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# FORE-WORD:



In November 2019, rumours started coming out of China that there was a new virus that was hitting local communities in Wuhan. Although the news gained some interest amongst those people tasked with monitoring such events and advising governments and agencies across the world, it is fair to say that outside of a small group of specialists, there was little if any awareness of the potential impact of these stories. There was certainly no idea that four months later the world would be in the grip of what had by that time come to be recognised as a global pandemic, one that not only resulted in a global lockdown that hit almost every community of the earth – but that twelve months on, it is still unclear as to what the exit strategy for that lockdown might be.

No-one can say that this was unexpected or unprecedented – two words (amongst many) that have been massively over-used in the context of Covid-19. Leading authorities had been predicting the likelihood, and in some cases inevitability, of a major pandemic. There have been major pandemic scares on a regular basis. MERS, SARS, Swine Flu, Avian Flu, Zika and Ebola had all demonstrated the power of viruses to mutate and to become both highly infectious and highly lethal. The UK Government 2017 National Risk Register had Pandemic Flu as its number one risk in terms of both likelihood and impact, with Emergent Virus Pandemic at the same level of likelihood (4/5 over a five-year period), but with a lower level of projected impact.

It was in fact the failure to understand the significance of the level of impact of a global pandemic that was at the heart of worldwide governments' failure to either prepare for a potential pandemic or respond when one started to develop.

The scale of that failure can be seen in the fact that the official projection of deaths in the UK from a global pandemic, based on extrapolation from figures from SARS and MERS, was 250 fatalities.

And yet, from a strategic crisis management perspective, it is important to differentiate between the emergency and the crisis. Coronavirus / Covid-19 was not a crisis. It was certainly a high-impact event, but what we have seen across the world in terms of impacts and long-term damage was not an inevitable outcome. We have seen in those countries of South-East Asia that had been through SARS in 2003, that exposure to previous pandemics created an understanding of the significance of the event at an early stage in its development cycle, and an ability to engage with it based on rational modelling, proactive intervention, and a collective commitment from multiple stakeholders across the private and public sectors.

In that sense, the Covid-19 global pandemic was exactly the sort of event that national and multinational crisis management planners should have been preparing for. And yet once the pandemic moved from a local outbreak to a global phenomenon, the outstanding feature of the response was the complete lack of a global perspective, the utilisation of global resources and the agreement of a single integrated and comprehensive programme that would have allowed humanity as a whole to engage with and respond to a truly planetary threat.

Covid-19 was not unprecedented (and it was much more akin to Michelle Wucker's concept of a Gray Rhino than Nassim Taleb's Black Swan), but the impacts of Covid-19 have been.

Societies have been put into lockdown. Major cities have become ghost towns. Entire economic sectors have been decimated – and in some cases, wiped out. Education of our children has been disrupted. Our fundamental models of business, commerce, travel, socialising, education, entertainment have been affected to such a degree that it is questionable as to how, or even if, they can return to something resembling their previous state. As in all high impact events, it is those who were most vulnerable at the start who have been most affected. Levels of poverty, mental health, depression, and domestic violence have soared at the same time as we have seen a polarisation and the emergence of new forms of anti-truth activism and highly inflammatory populist rhetoric across the political spectrums.

It became clear from the start of the impacts of Covid-19 that this was not going to be an event like any other. As one of our commentators said in a Campfire, ‘From a social historian’s perspective – what a wonderful time to be alive’. It is often the case that we are not aware that we are living through history, and in retrospect we often regret not keeping a record of our thoughts and feelings that would have both significance and value at a later date. Although we did not realise the significance at the time, we decided very early in the Covid-19 development to hold a series of webinar calls that would allow our members from around the world to share thoughts on what Covid-19 meant and to discuss how we, as both a global organisation and one that had strong connections into our Chapters around the world, could contribute to and perhaps influence, that conversation.

It was the need to have Campfires that would allow people from any time-zone to dial in, that meant that we held them twice a week. One year later we are publishing this report to mark the 100 th Coronavirus Campfire, exactly one year after the start of Covid-19. Little did we know that we would be recording the thoughts, fears, anger, frustration (and occasional optimism) of a global community of people, some of whom dropped in once or twice, many of whom have been regular contributors over the full cycle. This has become a global longitudinal study of our immediate response to the news of the day, from the first recognition of the significance of Covid-19; the first lockdown; the belief that ‘it would be over by Summer’; the initial releases from lockdown and the subsequent spike in infections; the recognition that this was a long-term issue and that our leaders seemingly had little if any idea of what it was that they needed to do, and the development of a belief in the power of the vaccines to solve these problems that we see today.

We saw the emergence of leaders who seemed to be able to capture the support and imagination of their citizens and to forge a national spirit in the face of unprecedented challenges, and we saw those that either misunderstood the state of their nations, or actively went out to politicize what was by its very definition a universal and potentially existential threat. We have seen, on a weekly basis, the impacts that job losses, family deaths, long-term anxiety and a feeling of helplessness can have. We have also created a community where people feel a sense of belonging, which has given a point of focus and meaning in what could otherwise be a chaotic world. We have forged friendships and offered mutual support and encouragement. Above all we have brought a sense of global perspective, personal insight, collaboration, and exchange of views that has been at the heart of the ISRM since its inception.

The last twelve months has been a period of genuinely unprecedented challenges. It is possible that, with the development of effective vaccines, we are now coming out of the acute period of the pandemic. Even if that is true, the impacts and significances of the 2020 global lockdown will leave scars that will last for generations and will have life-long effects on many of the people who have lived through it.

I hope that this report will help contribute to an understanding of what this global event has meant, and how we can gather lessons that will allow us to ensure that we will be better prepared for equally challenging events in the future.

My thanks to everyone who has been part of the ISRM Coronavirus Campfire project over the last year, and to all of the countless heroes around the world who have in some way made their own contribution to our understanding of, engagement with and recovery from Covid-19 over the last twelve months.



**David RUBENS**  
Executive Director

*24<sup>th</sup> February 2021*

# INTRO DUC TION:

2020 started off with apocalyptic pictures from wildfires in Australia, sparking discussions about extreme weather events and climate change. What looked like scenes straight out of dystopian science-fiction was surely going to be one of the most harrowing pictures of the year. Two months later, these pictures had all but disappeared. A new virus had slowly been creeping through newsfeeds and through an increasing number of countries. What started out as a local event in Wuhan, China soon became a national and then rapidly an international concern. Chinese authorities closed Wuhan off and imposed a lockdown that completely emptied its streets. Outside of China, few were aware of the effect the virus could have on the human body and no one imagined how it would completely disrupt life as people knew it. As long as the spread was slow, life went on as normal. This all changed suddenly in March when many countries felt the impact of the virus and the effect it had on their health care systems.



# THE FIRST WAVE

March 2020

## SUDDEN IMPACT

After the coronavirus continued to spread throughout the world and with many countries reporting their first Covid-19-related deaths during February, March saw rapidly rising infection numbers and governments taking different approaches to try and contain the spread of the virus. As the impact of the pandemic on economy and social life grew, people were faced with a changing reality professionally and privately. The ISRM saw the need to connect, share experiences and make sense of the changing situation and established the Coronavirus Campfires as a place to discuss any Covid-19-related topic. Many of the early discussion topics stayed relevant throughout the pandemic, such as trust in government, compliance and lessons learned.

# GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE



Two of the prevalent topics of the March Campfires were leadership and going into lockdown. While there was a general expression of trust in leadership and that the right decisions were made albeit a bit late, there was also criticism. Trust needed to be earned continuously and could disappear over the next couple of weeks. With a global pandemic at hand, many felt the need for a coordinated global response. However, there was no show of unity or leadership. Within the European Union and the United Nations, member countries closed themselves off instead of cooperating. This lack of a global effort was attributed to the elusiveness and vagueness of the virus that prompted individual country responses based on their history and culture. There was also the feeling that many national leaders were afraid to take on responsibility. Good leaders step forward when things go wrong and take control of the situation, which was clearly absent in countries like the United States. Yet, there was hope that community-based responses would develop within the next couple of weeks and that global cooperation could be achieved on a corporate level.

By the end of March many countries had gone into lockdown or started to implement policies that restricted movement and encouraged social distancing. Terms such as essential workers and businesses started to be used more as governments tried to identify the bare minimum of open businesses to contain the spread of the virus.

With still limited testing there was fear that already stretched health systems could be overwhelmed. Globally, these restrictions were implemented in various forms and severity. The question was whether or not democracies were well-suited to enforce lockdowns was raised as many non-democratic countries used the threat of harsh punishment and their military to accomplish their goals. In Europe, non-compliance was still high in the UK when restrictive measures were announced that had not been in effect since the Second World War. In Germany, there was an understanding of the situation while trying to balance restrictions and ensuring business continuity. A participant from Georgia pointed out an early government reaction with good contact tracing and isolating those who had been at risk, which also showed how smaller and more agile countries could succeed in their response by being fast and a lot tougher on themselves. Africa and the Middle East saw local solutions such as stay at home policies, social distancing campaigns and closed schools and non-essential businesses, but also local curfews enforced by the military. South Africa reportedly had good management throughout the country, by relying on scientific modelling and following WHO guidelines. Australia went into lockdown despite mixed messages from federal and state government. Finally, in South Asia, both Pakistan and India went into a gradual lockdown with travel restrictions, shutting down of public transport and allowing movement only with certificates.

**How sustainable would it be in ten to twelve weeks?**

**How could governments effectively prepare for the virus to come back later in the year?**

**Would lessons be learned and behaviour changed, or would government just try go back to the old normal?**



Having a huge uneducated population and a largely cash-based society, transmission risks were not only high, but many did not understand the gravity of the situation and would only take it seriously once it was out of control. On the other hand, many people in India also believed that due to exposure to a variety of diseases there would be a natural resistance to the Coronavirus and herd immunity could eventually be achieved. An early estimate put the cost at 250,000 dead.

Despite what the following weeks would bring, the Campfire participants discussed and raised questions about what being in lockdown meant. It was easy getting into a lockdown but much harder to get out of it. How sustainable would it be in ten to twelve weeks? How could governments effectively prepare for the virus to come back later in the year? Would lessons be learned and behaviour changed, or would governments just try go back to the old normal?

## **EARLY LESSONS**

Many participants were pessimistic about lessons being learned. It seemed as no one was talking to the Chinese about their response and even though lessons from near-misses such as SARS, MERS or H1N1 existed, no one seemed to remember those. Planning for zoonotic diseases included to move away from the thought that such a breakout could be contained locally in a globalized world. In light of this, a participant pointed to the need to prepare better, not recover faster and called for a network of coordination and cooperation along with national emergency ministers who could liaison with big tech, big business, academia and law enforcement for their expertise and logistical capabilities. It was due to high turnover of staff and loss of institutional memory that few organizations had the pandemic on their radar, and that many were severely unprepared for lockdowns, despite early warnings.

At a glimpse, it seemed that the private sector was managing the pandemic better than some governments. They were quick to react and encouraged working from home. However, this change was more due to pressure to the current business model than natural resilience. Several participants predicted disruptions to businesses in the second half of 2020, with skeleton operations throughout multiple industries. Retail was seen to be extremely vulnerable and its existence dependent on the following months. Not selling products would ultimately force them out of business. Similarly, the hospitality industry was immediately affected at full scale halting entire operations.



With travel stops and massive scaling down of business travel there was an urgency to adjust their businesses and to rebuild immediately while being overwhelmed with information. While working from home could prove to be even beneficial for many businesses there was much concern about the hardships in communities with job losses. There could be a huge economic impact not only with job losses but also supply chain disruptions and shortages of daily supplies that could cause a spark in crimes and maybe even civil unrest.

Social tension had been visible since the beginning of the pandemic. Not only because of economic uncertainty, but because of forcing people to remain in confined spaces amidst a lockdown. Living in a small apartment with two kids and not being able to work put unprecedented psychological pressure on many people. They were at home and restless, filled with fear and despair. Unfortunately, an increase in domestic violence was the immediate result. With many victims unable to reach out as the perpetrator would be always nearby, first responders were limited in their ability to respond to every call.

# THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## SPOTLIGHT:

Amidst an increasingly deep societal divide, tensions remained high in the US during March. President Trump maintained his stance that the virus would suddenly vanish and verbally attacked reporters who would ask questions that would suggest otherwise. In several parts of the States participants of the Campfires certainly felt that the virus was there to stay, that emotions were on a boiling point and that the possibility of civil unrest seemed closer than ever. While coming to terms with the situation and experiencing panic, fear, and despair in one state, there was business as usual with a more or less open rejection of any restrictions to the accepted way of life in others. With a history of individual and independent solutions, asking people to stay indoors and limiting their contacts felt like a sacrifice to many that was going against the grain on what the country was built on. Doing what was best for the common good seemed not to be the current American way as one participant put it. However, there was another side where the rising infection numbers were a sudden wake-up call and a realization that the virus would not stay in Asia, the Middle East, or Europe. Many managers felt overwhelmed by the situation, turning to the company's crisis managers, and looking to the government for an appropriate response. The feeling was shared that the government did not understand exponential risk and growth and that, unlike 9/11, the virus remained a vague entity without visible impact that was difficult to rally against as a nation. In order for the tension and fear to settle down, better and more honest communication would be needed, but there was little hope that could be achieved with the current administration.



## A SLEDGE- HAMMER TO CRACK A NUT?

# THE FIRST WAVE

April 2020

After lockdowns and policies for economic support were put in place all over the world during March, the lingering question on the Campfires during April was how to accommodate to this new way of life and how to get out of lockdown? Small business owners were suddenly unable to continue their work and had to rely on government help. In cash-based societies, economic pressure was increasingly visible and calls for ending lockdowns became louder. There were voices comparing them to using a hammer to crush a walnut as governments pushed back the release from lockdown. There was concern that governments did not understand the complexity of a lockdown. They were entrenched in tribalism and did not come together to handle the crisis.



# GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Being in lockdown meant different things depending on where people lived in the world. This could range from very strict to relatively loose lockdowns. Throughout April, participants from all over the world shared insight into how different countries handled the pandemic.



## UK

Due to the culture in the UK, enforcing the lockdown posed to be difficult as police could not take as hard a stance as in France, Italy, or Spain. Additionally, trust in leadership slowly eroded throughout April. Partly due to Boris Johnson's Covid-19 infection and him being side-lined, the population started to feel that a long-term strategy was missing. One participant and small business owner experienced a cancellation of 80% of his workload and the stress of balancing home office with home schooling at the beginning of the month but viewed government response to be proportionate and that government support was easily obtained without any obstacles or waiting times. However, at the end of the month, participants were increasingly vocal about the shortcomings in the government's approach. Participants expressed that their trust in government had been rapidly dwindling. Reasons mentioned were that government had not acknowledged that they were slow to respond, did not take responsibility for their lack of initial action and that after Boris Johnson had been side-lined any government action had been absent. Others felt that the UK was waiting on how other European countries would respond before taking action, while a prolonged lockdown could lead to increasing social problems. One participant in particular stated that the government was simply not doing a good job. The strategy was not well implemented or fit for its purpose. He expected that the UK would ultimately come out at the bottom of the class regarding mortality levels and that a major depression could lay ahead. There was a need to decentralize as a way out of the lockdown. Capacity needed to be built at the local level, where risk should be managed and where monitoring, testing and contact tracing could be conducted. By the end of April, the concern was that fundamental mistakes were made and that there was no long-term exit strategy.

## EUROPE

In other parts of Europe, the situation developed differently. Switzerland planned to reopen schools in May to gradually get out of lockdown. With high levels of testing, low mortality rates and Switzerland's civil protection service aiding law enforcement, society supported the current measures. SMEs received financial support from government and all in all, participants said that leadership was good. There were still challenges in how to reopen, as there was no obligation to wear masks, safety measures in companies and shops were not unified and many aspects remained unclear. Participants from Spain said that their government tried their best. With almost two months in lockdown and a disproportionate death toll however, there was little trust in government and the reported numbers. Were deaths underreported by only counting those who occurred in hospitals? Italy faced a loss of freedom according to one participant who listed the restrictions. There was a need to stay at home, leaving the house was only allowed within a 200m wide radius and an official document was needed to buy groceries. South Eastern Europe had also been in a prolonged lockdown and people started to get nervous. While government changed policy measures and procedures based on developments on the ground, many were worried about the economic impact as tourism was severely affected, especially in Croatia and Montenegro.

## ASIA

What was considered a strict lockdown in Europe, was the standard for many participants in Asian countries. In Singapore, only essential workers were allowed to work, masks were mandatory, and people were only allowed to go grocery shopping twice a week. Non-compliance was punishable with fines and jail time. While the government in Pakistan tried to get a grip on infection rates and relieve its national health system, there were concerns about the economy.

While it employed its military to help police forces to enforce a partial lockdown, it allowed the public to work and ensure the survival of their families. Because of this, streets were full of traffic, even though public transport and the largest motorway in the country had been shut down. Participants expected the lockdown to last until the end of Ramadan in May but were worried about wandering preachers who drove the spread of virus through visiting different mosques. A spike in infections and a possible second wave because of Ramadan was also a concern in Malaysia by the end of April. Breaking fast at the end of the day caused mass congregations that drove infection numbers up.

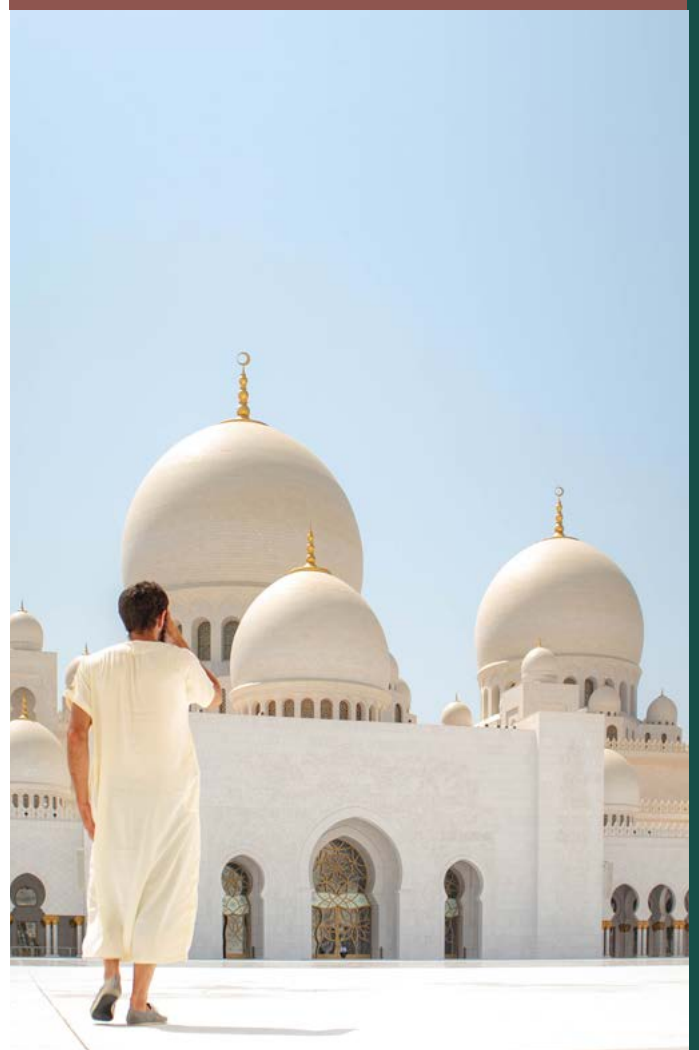
## AFRICA

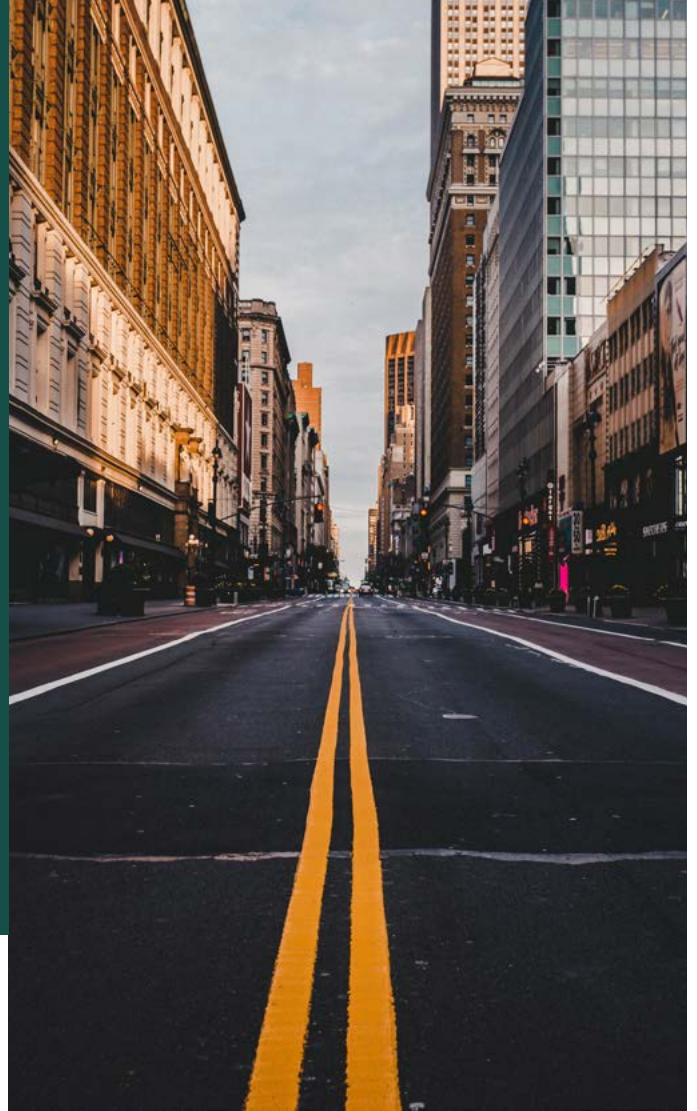
Social and economic pressure grew in Kenya as the country could not guarantee a social safety net and people were dependent on doing business. Four hotspots in the country had partial lockdowns. It was strictly enforced in Nairobi with a curfew at night and a ban on travelling outside of the city. Infection numbers were still relatively low and different counties opted for different mitigation measures. South Africa had already to deal with a high number of HIV and Tuberculosis patients which is why its globally well-connected medical network could quickly jump into action. Experts on immune system related problems advised the government and President Cyril Ramaphosa was seen as a statesman who could be trusted with handling the pandemic. While the white middle class of South Africa responded well to the imposed lockdown during April, the large majority of the population could simply not survive in a 24/7 lockdown situation as they did not have an income cushion. The fact there had been no major disruptions or rioting could be partly credited to having a respected president. By the end of the month, spread had remained slow but a surge of infections in the townships was expected to happen in the future. For now, the pandemic was mostly contained in a few hotspots.

## MIDDLE EAST

While Ramadan was also celebrated in the Middle East and similar concerns as in Asia were expressed, participants from Dubai pointed out that they lived in a tourism-based economy that had taken a significant hit and left many people unemployed. By the end of April, talks of slowly reopening were taken into action, but offices were not allowed more than 30% occupancy and people were still only allowed to go to the supermarket twice a week.

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## US

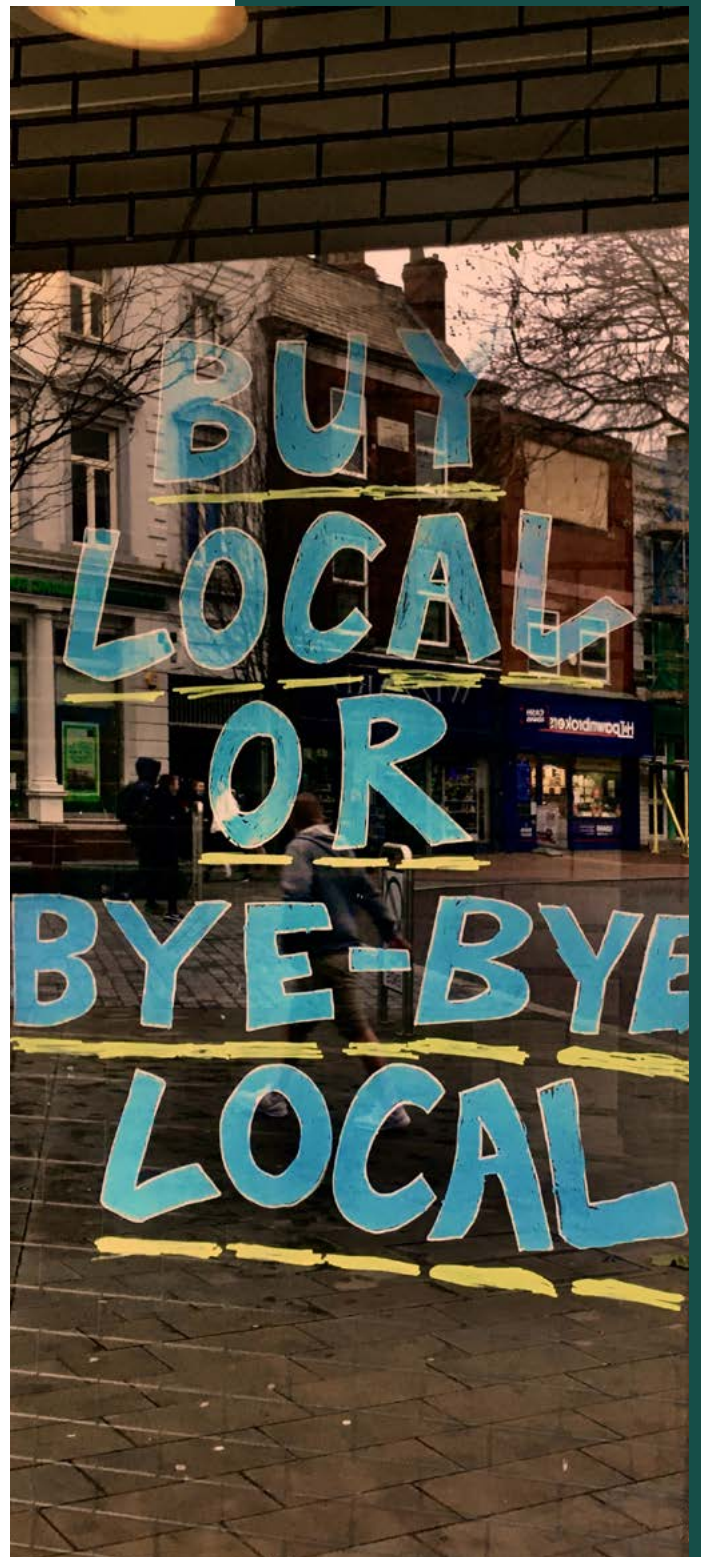
Participants from the US painted a different picture depending on where they were located. While the eastern part of the US was suffering from high infection rates, the western part apart from the West Coast was still almost Covid-19-free. Especially citizens in rural areas were upset with restrictions that did not seem to be grounded in their reality and because of hearing differing messaging from the president of the United States. State governors were forced to continuously reiterate that they were in control of lockdown measures but reacted differently to the changing situation. While some assembled strong teams of medical and business advisors, other were just reacting to the events as they unfolded. Meanwhile, the president was pressing for a faster end of lockdown but was surprised when even his economic council of business leaders urged for more testing before easing any restrictions. While discussions went on about how to get people back to work, social tensions grew in Michigan in late April culminating with an armed protest at the Michigan Capitol against a lockdown that was perceived as an act of tyranny.

The experience throughout a locked down world was that getting into lockdown and ordering people to stay at home was very easy. While rich countries could afford shutting down their economies for now, economic pressure had been built up in cash-based societies that did not possess any social safety nets. Combined with few deaths and only minor infection numbers, lockdowns were seen as a hammer to crack a walnut and compliance was achieved by threat of punishment. With the prospect of reopening in mid-May in most countries, Campfire participants asked themselves what this reopening would look like. Rebuilding an economy that completely had come to a halt, required forethought, planning and execution across government, business, and the social sector, for which no playbook yet existed.

# CHANGING BUSINESS MODELS AND REMOTE WORKING

**Throughout April, business leaders had to come to terms with their business models basically changing overnight and challenges arising due to worldwide lockdowns. Participants of the Campfires worked in different sectors and shared the challenges of transforming their businesses and dealing with a new reality.**

One of the sectors that was immediately and heavily hit was the hospitality and travel sector. Lockdown proved to have a major impact on the ability to operate but also allowed to provide full-service facilities for keyworkers, housing for emergency services, and even triage centres. During April, the hospitality sector was looking forward to reopening in the summer but was aware that the pandemic had impacted it for a long time to come. While some business divisions within the sector could work remotely, the majority was dependent on physical environments with lots of people. Even if restrictions were to be relaxed, there was a lot of uncertainty about whether or not people would continue to travel at all, if the mode of transportation would stay the same, and if there was still as much demand for business travel as businesses transitioned into remote working. One participant stated that travel along with the associated travel risk management and hotels was no longer necessary in a digital world. The business model would have to change long-term, but the number of people employed would undoubtedly go down far earlier than that. Hotels could easily reduce their staff by 50% and layoffs were already underway in April. Another participant argued that market research showed that there was still much appetite for travelling and that people were waiting to be able to fly again. A future business model could place an emphasis on offering workspaces to businesses that reduced their office space during the pandemic in favour of remote working. As working from home replaced traditional models of office work, Campfire participants pointed out the advantages and disadvantages. While juggling children, home-schooling, and work could be a challenge for young parents, productivity remained high. People were able to do extra work without the need for commuting. Many businesses maintained an office capacity of 30% but were starting to look towards cutting costs as rent was expensive and remote work a suitable and lucrative solution. Some of the drawbacks included the difficulties of relationship building with clients and colleagues.



**For now, a handbrake was jammed on this motion and demand had been slowed and even completely destroyed. Some participants asked if we still were in a modern economy or if we currently experienced an economy that had been knocked unconscious and had not woken up yet.**

In the industrial sector, remote working was hardly an option and companies prepared workplaces for social distancing measures while trying to stay operational. Modern economy had been built on an idea of constant motion where everyone was involved. For now, a handbrake was jammed on this motion and demand had been slowed and sometimes even completely destroyed. Some participants asked if we still were in a modern economy or if we were currently experiencing an economy that had been knocked unconscious and had not woken up yet.

With two months into the pandemic, Campfire participants in April sought and discussed ways to reopen. The current state of the economy was not sustainable and all the financial support from governments would have to be returned at one point, either through taxes or cutbacks. A massive amount of people did not have spare capacities and amidst this financial pressure the already significant increase of domestic violence and mental health issues would continue to grow. There was no easy way back to the old normal and the transition out of lockdowns would be challenging to say the least. Governments needed to build up trust and reassure the public that reopening is safe. Failing to achieve that would drive people to look into different sources and create their own reality. Reddit editors and conspiracy theorists were already hard at work creating that alternative reality and their disinformation slowly started to capture the attention of those who tried to make sense of the pandemic and did not understand and trust the government.







# THE FIRST WAVE

May 2020

## WORK TODAY, EAT TOMORROW

With the world in lockdown, infection numbers were finally starting to go down and many countries were looking for ways to reopen in May. What would going back to school or work look like? What would it mean to lift lockdowns and accept the new normal for society? What were the effects of lockdown on the economy? Many participants of the Campfires expected that new infection spikes were inevitable as soon as lockdowns would be lifted and that there would be the need of a community-based response to effectively manage this return. Taken from the crisis management playbook, the survival phase was coming to an end to make way for the management phase of the pandemic. Could governments provide the necessary tools and resources that were necessary? Criticism of national governments had been growing since April and many expressed that they had lost faith and trust in their governments.

# GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

## UK

While the UK was in lockdown for most of May, participants of the Campfires discussed how the perception of Boris Johnson had changed after his hospitalization in April. While his actions were seen positively during March, there was the feeling that his hospitalization left a vacuum that was not filled and that he seemed to have lost his way since returning from the hospital. While new networks were trying to spread positive images, such as Captain Tom's NHS walk, Johnson's Sunday press conferences left the feeling that he wanted to achieve the same, but that people had lost trust in his messaging. Yet, participants felt that the UK government provided a balanced view of personal responsibility and that the community adhered to the guidelines, but also expressed concern, that without strong leadership and with contradicting and untransparent messaging compliance might erode.

## EUROPE

Reopening was on the agenda in Switzerland throughout May. Still in the planning stages in early May, with border closings due to a shared border with Italy, and an awareness that reopening would cause new problems and challenges, the community was working well together. By the end of May, this had slightly changed. The Swiss people wanted to get back to work but the Cantons approached this move differently based on their lessons learned and adjustments to the process. As a result, the public started to push back in some areas and question or outright reject government information.



## ASIA

The situation was completely different in Pakistan and India during May. Participants commented that it was a messy situation for everybody involved. The government in Pakistan seemed ill-prepared, there was ineffective communication, and experts were frequently ignored. Alongside other predominantly Muslim countries, Pakistan's government felt the pressure to ease lockdowns for Ramadan and Eid, resulting in a spike of cases due to lack of physical distancing. The approach to the pandemic seemed to be a trial-and-error process. Regional governments often clashed with central government on how to move forward. There was concern that the effects of the pandemic would be felt in the country for the next four to five years.

The situation in India was tense as well. People all over the country left cities to return home in what can best be described as internal migration. While there was technically still a lockdown, a huge number of the population was living in dire conditions and relied on work to provide food for their families. In the poor parts of large cities such as Mumbai, NGOs and government bodies stepped in to provide food and essential services. Campfire participants criticised the lack of a structured response, even though government did provide stimulus packages and tried to support the domestic manufacturing industry.

# AFRICA

Despite relatively low numbers during April and partial lockdowns in several hotspots such as Nairobi, Kenya saw a gradual increase in cases. As the majority of citizens of Nairobi were dependent on daily labour, the city itself was crowded, even though the partial lockdown was still in place. Similar to India and Pakistan, the phrase work today, eat tomorrow was the daily reality of many people and the constant real threat from hunger and starvation pushed people to take risks. In a country with issues such as unemployment, corruption, and additional pressure from parallel crises such as flooding, government resources were too scarce to have any tangible impact. Economic pressure and communication failures caused the population to lack an understanding of Covid-19 and ultimately not taking it seriously.

Egypt also saw an increase in cases and a public that did not understand the situation or receive much government support. May saw the release of a huge number of criminals and the army trying to maintain order. With the government focused on crime, economic pressure grew. Small businesses were hurting, and the central bank imposed excessive restrictions to transactions which strained the economy even further. Trust in government was low and any information was met with scepticism. The general feeling was that if the people did not look after themselves, nobody would.

A similar anxiety could be felt in South Africa, but for different reasons. South Africa had a lockdown in place that was well organized. With the prospect of reopening, officials were planning for worst case scenarios such as having to create mass graves as Covid-19 was still gaining momentum and was expected to continue to do so at a higher speed after opening up. One participant explained that it was needed to imagine these traumatic events up ahead, as they could not be planned otherwise. Could the system cope with such scenarios? The general population did not witness this planning and tried to casually get back to normal. The poor were hungry and economic pressure was building up. The solidarity that was felt for the first few weeks of lockdown could vanish as soon as lockdown would be lifted, and different risk clusters would emerge, with the poor at a much higher risk than the wealthier white middle class.

# MIDDLE EAST

Participants from Dubai were also confident that the lockdown would soon be lifted. The public had a desire to get back to work but was also concerned that rushing to reopen could spread the virus and effect the economy. Government response was seen to be well-organized and structured, but there were concerns that a second lockdown was inevitable, and that proper planning was still required.

**The general population did not witness this planning and tried to casually get back to normal. The poor were hungry and economic pressure was building up. The solidarity that was felt for the first few weeks of lockdown could be strained as soon as lockdown would be lifted and different risk clusters would emerge.**



## US & AUSTRALIA

The US continued the trend of conflicting messaging by President Trump and a political tug-o-war on the state and national level. The presidential messaging on one hand encouraged the government to take a slow and cautious approach, but on the other applauded armed protests against state lockdowns. As one participant saw it, the government tried to reinvent things as they went, which more or less resulted in making things up as they went and not following their own processes. During May, each state continued to focus on making their own decisions, either driven by political or scientific reasons. The political division was visibly felt in what measures were taken. While conservative states were pushing to reopen to keep the economy running, liberal states tended to be more cautious and focused on reducing the spread of the virus. One case of supply chain disruption because of Covid-19 could be witnessed when several meatpacking and processing facilities had to close down because they were infection hotspots, which resulted in a significant decline in meat production during the month.



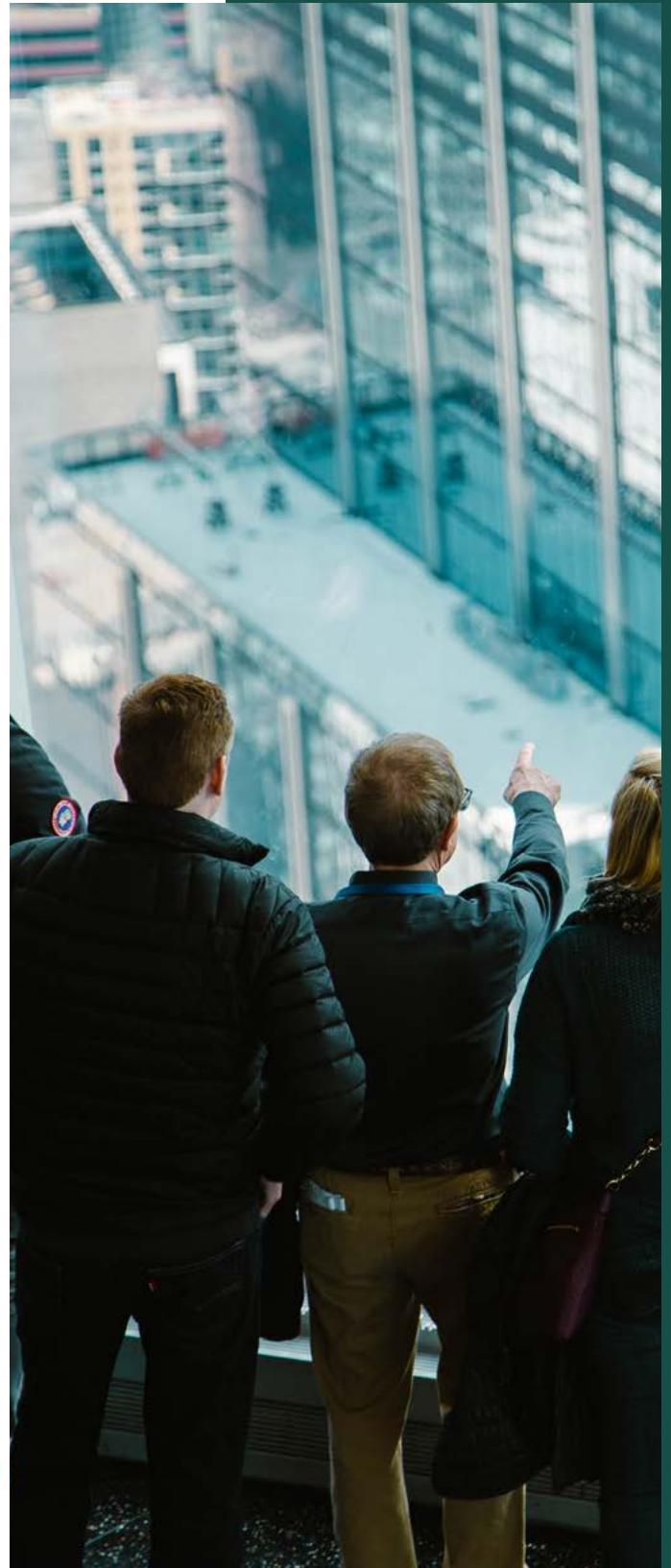
As many other countries, Australia was also moving ahead to get out of lockdown. Many of the remote and rural areas of Australia saw a significant decrease in cases. After an initial period of panic during March, Australia was now moving at a steadier pace. Participants expressed that Australia was doing okay. As large parts of the population lived in houses with backyards, the negative effects of lockdown could be mitigated for now, and the government was heavily investing to minimize the economic impact. The only concern was that money would run out by September if the situation would not change.

# LEADERSHIP DURING THE FIRST PHASE

**With the end of the first lockdowns in sight, many Campfire discussions focused on different aspects of leadership. What challenges did leaders face? Did they rise to the occasion or did they try to evade responsibility? How effective was their communication and did the population trust their decisions?**

Communications and trust were viewed to be at the centre of every crisis response, and this was where many leaders lost their citizens for a variety of reasons. One participant compared the current crisis communication to a car crash with politicization being the driver. The desire to announce a good and strong message at daily press conferences caused them to make announcements too early, use vague phrasing and overpromise on what they were unable to deliver. People started to listen less carefully, and trust was eroding slowly resulting in a breakdown of social distancing and a growing belief that the actions taken were no longer relevant. With warmer months approaching, many more were expected to go to parks and beaches instead of staying at home. Leaders needed to understand that crisis were chaotic and complex events, and they failed to do so in the UK. As one campfire participant put it, politicians were avoiding responsibilities when they did not share information. It was bad management when Boris Johnson said that people were being able to go to work *next Monday* without consulting other relevant departments and people. There was no need for morale boosting quotes, but a need for good response management and leaders that were honest and had integrity instead of constantly changing the story. Broken down into simple concepts, leaders only had two responsibilities: keeping people safe and deploying resources.

When the crisis began, no one got to choose their leader. Leaders might not have expected to make decisions like they had to since March, but they should have known that problems were likely to come. People wanted them to say *I got this!* as this was part of the job and they needed to accept the responsibilities. A leader's decision would largely depend on knowledge and experience, but another factor seemed to be equally important and actually made a much-discussed difference during the May Campfires: empathy. There was much agreement that the best performing leaders were female leaders such as Jacinda Ardern or Angela Merkel.



One Campfire participant noted that the difference between male and female leaders seemed to be that male leaders were eager to make decisions without worrying too much about who would get hurt in the fallout, while female leaders worried about the people and based their decisions on potential impact.

Another aspect that distinguished male from female leaders, was the securitization of the pandemic. Male leaders had started to refer to a war on Covid-19, without realizing what that would entail. Having a war implied a clear objective and an identifiable enemy. That was not the case with the coronavirus as the virus was a part of the ecosphere, much like air or water. It was not a rational enemy that could be engaged with. The virus transcended these existing models and there was no working definition on when Covid-19 would be over. While several male leaders were still trying to figure out how to fight the coronavirus, female leaders managed their countries.

## DISPROPORTIONATE SUFFERING

When talking about the pandemic, the Campfires were lucky to have representation from all over the world as there was not enough attention to the disproportionate suffering in developing countries. There was a tendency to focus on large urban centres in the West and to dismiss the harsh reality of how the coronavirus disrupted countries in the developing world. In many of these countries, people were forced to work every day to be able to feed their families. If they did not earn today, they would not eat tomorrow. Existing problems were exacerbated by the virus, especially in countries that were prone to natural disasters. Governments were compelled to squeeze their existing resources to survive amidst heightened political rivalries. How long would they be able to last? Some countries had started to shift their approach from a health first focus to a more balanced approach that also included the economy, but progress would only be expected after a couple of months.



# BACK TO BUSINESS, BUT WHAT KIND OF BUSINESS?

By the end of May, lockdowns were seemingly ending, and many businesses were trying to figure out if their business model was still functional. The aim had to be to move into the new normal instead of trying to get back to the old normal. Business leaders needed to look at different ways of working and operating while also maintaining the existing social fabric. Companies that had already embedded resilient thinking would emerge from this with a better recovery and a competitive advantage. They would be able to turn adversity into opportunity. There was also opportunity for those willing to bring reform and change and strategically re-evaluating their business models.

However, a huge number of businesses would see their business model fail or would have to drastically cut costs to survive. Participants argued that the failure of some business models had been inevitable but were accelerated by the pandemic. Whatever the case, the impact on the current economy would be felt heavily. While cutting personnel would cut costs it would also remove a lot of spending power from an already challenged market. Lockdowns were not sustainable. Even with governments spending huge amounts of money on survival and recovery the prolonged lockdowns would cause a long-term impact that was impossible to assess in May. With businesses in dire straits and unforeseeable economic consequences, some participants called to be cautious and not lift lockdowns too early as the situation could relapse quickly and cause another spike in a few weeks. Would there be a second wave after the lockdowns ended?



# COMMUNITY RESPONSE

## SPOTLIGHT:

The role of the community had always been emphasized on the Campfires but was a major part of the May discussions. There was no doubt that ownership and engagement had to be at the community level. Due to the nature of complex societies, the impact of the coronavirus would cause a public health crisis which had the potential to then evolve into a social and economic crisis. Coping with these issues would require changes of policies and national directives, but also changes in personal behaviour and norms. These changes would need to co-evolve and unless a sense of engagement and ownership was built at the local level, any measure would be seen as enforced rather than consensual. Increasing levels of coercion would lead to a crisis of legitimacy.

The answer to this problem would be to build communities to be self-organizing systems, with high degrees of responsiveness, adaptiveness, and capabilities. Bringing decision-making to the lowest appropriate local administration level by having them as national as necessary and as local as practical would allow to identify different risk profiles in different parts of a country and manage this risk at a more decentralized level.

Good risk governance and strong resilience capabilities would have to be put in place at the community level. This was where the needs of local people and their livelihoods needed to be discussed and appropriate local solutions to be found. By doing so, these locally owned and managed solutions could create a culture of engagement and support, allowing the crisis to be effectively managed at a local level with an overarching national framework.

At least in the UK a structure that could support such an approach was already in place, despite being underinvested and underutilized. Campfire participants echoed that these local resilience forums needed to be empowered. They would need resources, responsibility, and authority. Another local resource that had been neglected was volunteerism. Instead of exhausting and exploiting volunteers as it had been done many times before, they could be easily turned into a strategic, replenishable and sustainable resort. Volunteerism in itself could be viewed as a manifestation of people's own source of resilience.

A strategic community response would require all of societies engagement, not just empowering different actors at different administrative levels but also creating synergy and complementarity between the different parts, as a functioning model would be as much about local as it would be about national leadership and ultimately moving away from a one-fits-all strategy.







# CAMPFIRE REPORT

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