



Kisan Shikshan Prasarak Mandal,  
Borgoan (Kale) Tq. & Dist. Latur's

NAAC Accredited 'B' Grade



**Vasantrao Kale Mahavidyalaya,**  
Dhoki. Tq & Dist - Osmanabad.



&  
**Akhil Maharashtra Itihas Parishad, Pune**

Jointly Organize

One Day International Conference on

**"The History of Pandemic like Covid-19 & Its Impact on  
Socio-Economic & Political Sectors in the World"**

**Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

ISSN No. : 2278-9308

Impact Factor : 7.675

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## "Impact of covid-19 pandemic on environmental factors in the world"

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### Abstract

This research aims to show the positive and negative indirect effects of COVID-19 on the environment, particularly in the most affected countries such as China, USA, Italy, and Spain. Our research shows that there is a significant association between contingency measures and improvement in air quality, clean beaches and environmental noise reduction. On the other hand, there are also negative secondary aspects such as the reduction in recycling and the increase in waste, further endangering the contamination of physical spaces (water and land), in addition to air. Global economic activity is expected to return in the coming months in most countries (even if slowly), so decreasing GHG concentrations during a short period is not a sustainable way to clean up our environment

### Introduction

The new corona virus (SARS-CoV2) has generated an unprecedented impact in most countries of the world. The virus has affected almost every country on the planet (213 in total), spread to more than 2 million people, and caused around 130,000 deaths (WHO, 2020a).

Currently, most countries have tried to fight the spread of the virus with massive COVID-19 screening tests and establishing public policies of social distancing. It is clear that the priority revolves around people's health.

For this reason, the indirect impact of the virus on the environment has been little analyzed. The first studies estimated a positive indirect impact on the environment. On the one hand, climate experts predict that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions could drop to proportions never before seen since World War II (*Global Carbon Project, 2020*). This outcome is mainly due to the social distancing policies adopted by the governments following the appearance of the pandemic.

For example, in Hubei province (China), strong social distancing measures were implemented in late 2019. These measures affected the country's main economic activities. As a result, power plants and industrial facilities halted their production. Also, the use of vehicles decreased considerably. All this led to a dramatic reduction in the concentrations of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and Particulate Matter that have a diameter of less than 2.5 μm (PM 2.5) in the main Chinese cities (ESA, 2020a; CAMS, 2020).

**Natural Environment** encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally, meaning in this case not artificial. The term is most often applied to the Earth or some parts of Earth. This environment encompasses the interaction of all living species, climate, weather and natural resources that affect human survival and economic activity. The concept of the natural environment can be distinguished as components:

### Highlights

- Positive and negative indirect effects of COVID-19 on the environment are presented.
- Contingency policies are linked to improvements in air quality, clean beaches and less environmental noise.
- Increased waste and the reduction of recycling are negative side effects of COVID-19.
- Decreasing GHGs during a short period is not a sustainable way to clean up our environment.

### Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Environmental Factors in the World

1. Evolution of NO<sub>2</sub> Concentrations in Some Regions of Europe.



Also, the social distancing measures adopted by most governments have caused many beaches around the world to get cleaned up. This is a result of the reduction in waste generated by tourists who visit the beaches. Likewise, noise levels have fallen significantly in most countries. The decrease in the use of private and public transportation, as well as commercial activities, has caused a reduction in noise.

Despite the positive indirect effects on the environment, the new corona virus has also generated negative indirect ones. For example, in the USA, some cities have suspended recycling programs because authorities have been concerned about the risk of spreading the virus in recycling centers. On the other hand, in the European nations particularly affected, sustainable waste management has been restricted. For example, Italy has prohibited infected residents from sorting their waste.

On the other hand, some industries have seized the opportunity to repeal disposable bag bans. Companies that once encouraged consumers to bring their bags have increasingly switched to single-use packaging. For example, a popular coffee company announced a temporary ban on the use of reusable cups. Finally, online food ordering has increased. These growths are resulting in the increase of domestic waste, both organic and inorganic. This research aims to show the positive and negative indirect effects of the SARS-CoV2 corona virus on the environment. After analyzing each indirect effect, objective conclusions on the subject are presented.

## 2. Clean beaches

Beaches are one of the most important natural capital assets found in coastal areas Zambrano-Monserrate et al., 2018. They provide services (land, sand, recreation, and tourism) that are critical to the survival of coastal communities and possess intrinsic values that must be protected from overexploitation (Lucre). However, non-responsible use by people has caused many beaches in the world to present pollution problems (Part low).

The lack of tourists, as a result of the social distancing measures due to the new corona virus pandemic, has caused a notable change in the appearance of many beaches in the world. For example, beaches like those of Acapulco (Mexico), Barcelona (Spain), or Salinas (Ecuador) now look cleaner and with crystal clear waters.

## 3. Wildlife

Fish prices and demand for fish have decreased due to the pandemic, and fishing fleets around the world sit mostly idle. German scientist Rainer Faroese has said the fish biomass will increase due to the sharp decline in fishing, and projected that in European waters, some fish such as herring could double their biomass. As of April 2020, signs of aquatic recovery remain mostly anecdotal.

As people stayed at home due to lockdown and travel restrictions, some animals have been spotted in cities. Sea turtles were spotted laying eggs on beaches they once avoided such as the coast of the Bay of Bengal, due to the lowered levels of human interference and light pollution. In the United States, fatal vehicle collisions with animals such as deer, elk, moose, bears, mountain lions fell by 58% during March and April.

Conservationists expect that African countries will experience a massive surge in bush meat poaching. Matt Brown of the Nature Conservancy said that "When people don't have any other alternative for income, our prediction and we're seeing this in South Africa is that poaching will go up for high-value products like rhino horn and ivory." On the other hand, Gabon decided to ban the human consumption of bats and pangolins, to stem the spread of zoonotic diseases, as the novel corona virus is thought to have transmitted itself to humans through these animals. In June 2020, Myanmar allowed breeding of endangered animals such as tigers, pangolins, and elephants. Experts fear that the Southeast Asian country's attempts to deregulate wildlife hunting and breeding may create "a New Covid-19."

## 4. Fossil fuel industry



A report by the London-based think tank Carbon Tracker concludes that the corona virus pandemic may have pushed the fossil fuel industry into "terminal decline" as demand for oil and gas decreases while governments aim to accelerate the clean energy transition. It predicts that an annual 2% decline in demand for fossil fuels could cause the future profits of oil, gas and coal companies to collapse from an estimated \$39tn to \$14tn. However, according to Bloomberg New Energy Finance more than half a trillion dollars worldwide are currently intended to be poured into high-carbon industries. Preliminary disclosures from the Bank of England's Covid-19 Corporate Financing Facility indicate that billions of pounds of taxpayer support are intended to be funneled to fossil fuel companies. According to Reclaim Finance the European Central Bank intends to allocate as much as 220bn (£193bn) to fossil fuel industries. An assessment by Ernst & Young finds that a stimulus program that focuses on renewable energy and climate-friendly projects could create more than 100,000 direct jobs across Australia and estimates that every \$1m spent on renewable energy and exports creates 4.8 full-time jobs in renewable infrastructure while \$1m on fossil fuel projects would only create 1.7 full-time jobs.

### 5. Carbon Emissions

See also: Climate crisis, Travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, § Retail and food production, and § Investments and other economic measures

A study published in May 2020 found that the daily global carbon emissions during the lockdown measures in early April fell by 17% and could lead to an annual carbon emissions decline of up to 7%, which would be the biggest drop since World War II according to the researchers. They ascribe these decreases mainly to the reduction of transportation usage and industrial activities.<sup>[49][50]</sup> However, it has been noted that rebounding could diminish reductions due to the more limited industrial activities. Nevertheless, societal shifts caused by the corona virus lockdowns – like widespread telecommuting, adoption of remote work policies, and the use of virtual conference technology – may have a more sustained impact beyond the short-term reduction of transportation usage. Despite of this the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was the highest ever recorded in human history in May 2020. Energy and climate expert Constantine Samaras states that "a pandemic is the worst possible way to reduce emissions and that technological, behavioral and structural change is the best and only way to reduce emissions". Tsinghai University's Zhu Liu clarifies that "only when we would reduce our emissions even more than this for longer would we be able to see the decline in concentrations in the atmosphere". The world's demand for fossil fuels has decreased by almost 10% amid corona virus measures and reportedly many energy economists believe it may not recover from the crisis.

In a study published in August 2020, scientists estimate that global NOX emissions declined by as much as 30% in April but were offset by ~20% reduction in global SO2 emissions that weakens the cooling effect and conclude that the direct effect of the response to the pandemic on global warming will likely be negligible, with an estimated cooling of around  $0.01 \pm 0.005 \text{ } ^\circ\text{C}$  by 2030 compared to a baseline scenario but that indirect effects due to an economic recovery tailored towards stimulating a green economy, such as by reducing fossil fuel investments, could avoid future warming of  $0.3 \text{ } ^\circ\text{C}$  by 2050. The study indicates that systemic change in how humanity powers and feeds itself is required for a substantial impact on global warming

### 6. Water and COVID-19: Risks and Opportunities

The Pacific Institute's mission to create and advance solutions to the world's most pressing water challenges is more vital now than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the value of water and its connections to human health, but it has also highlighted longstanding water management deficiencies. For example, we know hand washing is one of the most effective ways for preventing the spread of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. Yet 40% of the global populations – 3



billion people – live without soap and water available at home. In the face of COVID-19, they are among the most vulnerable and most at risk of being left behind.

This challenge faces communities across the United States, including in California. In fact, more than 2 million Americans lack running water and indoor plumbing, and millions more can't afford basic water service. To make matters worse, the economic crisis precipitated by COVID-19 is causing unemployment in the U.S. to skyrocket, putting far more people at risk of being unable to pay for water.

This global health crisis has raised new water-related challenges for local communities, water agencies, and the private sector. Yet, it could also be an important turning point for addressing longstanding water management challenges, including the failure to provide safe and affordable water and sanitation for all. The surge in interest, along with potentially massive investments by the business community and government to mitigate risks and help ailing economies, could provide a rare opportunity for more effective and equitable water policy and management.

The Pacific Institute is committed to providing data, analysis, and recommendations for addressing the challenges posed by COVID-19. In May 2020, we launched a Water and Pandemic Task Force to provide timely and useful analysis and recommendations about the links between water, human health, the coronavirus, and the roles of the public and private sector. The task force was comprised of Pacific Institute staff and included collaboration with groups from around the world. Explore the work of our Water and Pandemic Task Force, as well as our other recent work on the COVID-19 pandemic and water:

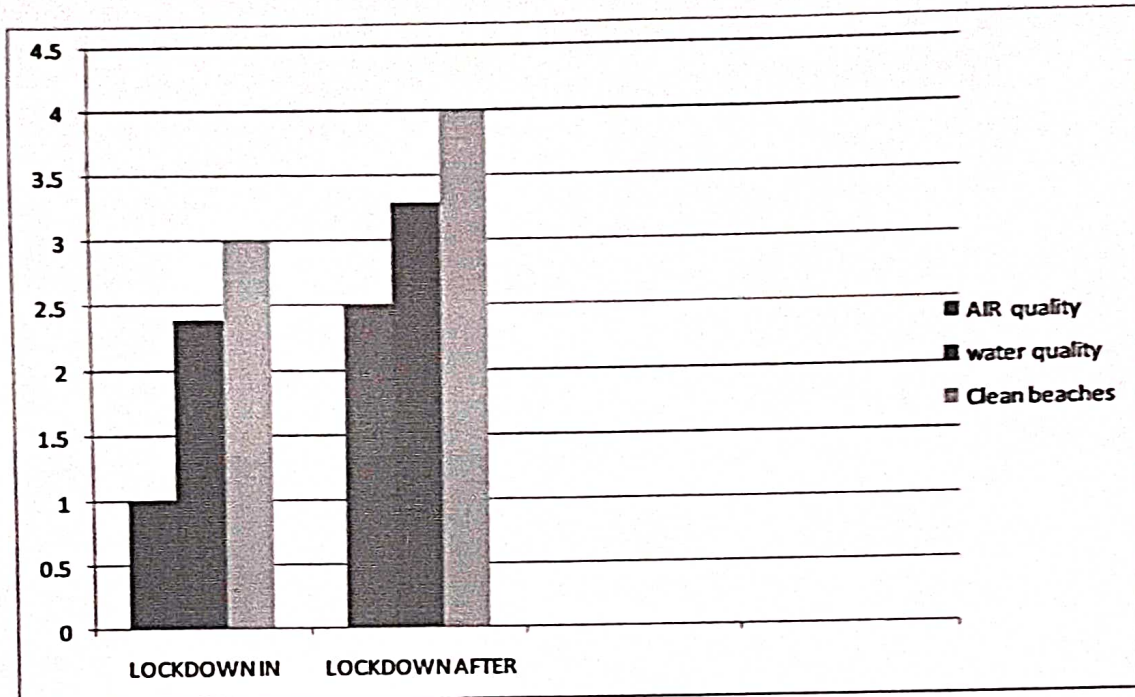
#### 7. Air Pollution COVID-19

The response to this pandemic also threatens to make air pollution's health impacts worse in the longer-term. Several governments are moving under the cover of COVID-19 to give industry a break and weaken clean air standards. In the US, the Environmental protection Agency (EPA) is accelerating its radical relaxation of regulation as the pandemic proliferates. In South Africa, air pollution standards have been significantly weakened during lockdown and this will, according to South Africa's Life After Coal Coalition, cause an estimated 3,300 premature deaths. There will be particularly profound health impacts on children, the elderly, pregnant women, and those already suffering from asthma, heart, and lung disease.

Some elected officials are taking a different tack. For instance, in Bogotá, Colombia's capital city, facing a 'triple threat' of poor air quality, seasonal respiratory illnesses and the pandemic, Mayor Claudia Lopez opened 76 kilometers of new bike lanes to reduce crowding on public transport and help prevent the spread of corona virus while simultaneously improving air quality and people's health.

As world leaders respond to the corona virus, they have a chance to chart a different course and make a major intervention for a healthy planet and healthy people. With trillions of dollars in economic stimulus investments in the offing, they have a golden opportunity to channel significant portions of those funds to fast forward to a renewable energy economy. A transition to clean, renewable energy and transport will seriously reduce air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and the impact of future pandemics.

The corona virus pandemic has made it clearer than ever that human and planetary health is intimately interconnected. The choice is ours to act accordingly.



#### COVID-19 IN & AFTER AIR QUALITY, WATER QUALITY, CLEAN BEACHES

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