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Leadership in Crisis: Markers of sustained influence for societal mobilisation in response to COVID-19[1]

'Funmi Olonisakin[2] and Barney Walsh[3]

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1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 (commonly known as coronavirus[4]), posed an intense and prolonged threat to many aspects of societal life – physical and mental health, livelihoods and economy, family and community – all at once. For societies confronted with coronavirus, this was insecurity on a large-scale, akin to war. Its global reach and impact was truly remarkable. This situation demanded a response that went beyond that of social mobilisation in "normal" times. It required the rapid deployment of the aggregation of an entire population and its resources to fight against this threat to their common existence. Societal mobilisation in this sense, was thus critical to an effective response to COVID-19 at any level of society – local, national, regional and global.

There is a natural tendency to 'mis-equate' social mobilisation with societal mobilisation. To be clear, the two concepts are not unrelated. The difference lies largely in degree and intensity. The World Health Organisation defines social mobilisation as 'the process of bringing together all societal and personal influences to raise awareness of and demand for health care, assist in the delivery of resources and services, and cultivate sustainable individual and community involvement'.[5] In relatively normal times, much time is invested in convening interdisciplinary action that targets change across various constituencies of actors to improve public health and sustain development. Invariably, mobilising human and financial resources to sustain development policy requires the alignment of political, governmental and business interests with communities of beneficiaries. The social mobilisation for the prevention of AIDS and the global campaign for eradication of polio are just two examples of social mobilisation in the last few decades.[6] It is a challenge to achieve this amid the

[1] This paper is a revised version of an African Leadership Centre Working Paper published in April 2000.
[2] Professor 'Funmi Olonisakin is Vice President, International, Engagement and Service (IES) at King's College London.
[3] Dr Barney Walsh is a Senior Lecturer in Security, Leadership and Development Education at the African Leadership Centre (ALC).
[4] Note that COVID-19 and Coronavirus are used interchangeably in this paper.
[5] World Health Organisation, *Social Mobilisation* at: https://www.who.int/healthpromotion/social-mobilization/en/ Accessed 28 April 2020.
[6] See, for example, BBC News Panorama's discussion of the national public health awareness campaign in the UK in the 1980s at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/4348096.stm
(accessed 08 May 2020); and Sanjay Chaturvedi, 'Vaccines, Social Mobilisation or any other Game Changer, Polio Eradication is an Unfinished Narrative', *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*, 38(2), April-June 2013, pp. 67-69.

competing priorities when it comes to governing life in the everyday.

Emergency and crisis situations, however, focus priority attention on protecting society from a major threat. This is even more so when human existence is endangered. Societal mobilisation is much more spontaneous, intense, rapid, and more total; it does not follow a defined course as policy actors scramble to respond to a fast-changing crisis situation that threatens collective existence. Human security and human development converge and are threatened at once. Situations of war, natural disasters, terrorist attacks and pandemics have tended to convey a sense of emergency – a threat to all. Again, experiences of the last decades are replete with examples such as the mobilisation of British society for the war effort in World War2; US societal mobilisation in the days and weeks following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack; Wenchuan earthquake in China in 2008 or Tangshan in 1976; and the Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa in 2014. The outbreak of COVID-19, a pandemic, certainly carried a similar sense of present danger, which if unmitigated was recognised as having the potential to devastate society. Under such circumstances, societal mobilisation is and was required. To be sure, this occurs when there is an underlying assumption that without societal mobilisation it will be difficult to overcome the imminent threat or crisis. Such mobilisation is an element of 'securitisation'- taking issues outside the rules of normal governance. Societal mobilisation could not be justified in the absence of a threat to the whole of society. It is unlikely to be attempted as part of normal governance. If attempted, it is unlikely to succeed.

This COVID-19 conceptual research paper seeks to examine societal mobilisation from a leadership perspective. An assumption underpinning this research is that '*the nature of leadership and how it is exercised in relation to societal mobilisation are central to responses and the outcomes achievable in crisis situations.*'[7] The research thus asks the central research question, 'who and what drove the assertions of sustained influence for societal mobilisation in response to COVID-19?' This should be read as something of a framing paper, whose primary purpose is to encourage more thorough and detailed case study work on COVID-19 responses that make use of the concepts and ideas presented here. The paper includes references to specific events and responses within the COVID-19 pandemic but is not a detailed case study in its own right: it hopes subsequent scholars further unpack and utilise the concepts discussed here when undertaking their own research, whether in relation to COVID-19 or other crisis moments.

The work argues that societal mobilisation as outlined, presupposes an existing *leadership infrastructure* that places a given society at a vantage point to respond effectively during crisis with all its resources – human, social and economic. In short, leadership infrastructure shapes the capacity and process of societal mobilisation in crisis situations. Ultimately, leadership was the striking difference between societies that responded effectively to the outbreak of COVID-19 and those that were less effective. It is not centrally about the wealth or poverty of the societies or the demographics. The underpinning features and determinants of that leadership infrastructure are discussed in the rest of this paper.

Following this introduction, the paper is divided into two main sections. The first discusses the key features of societal mobilisation. It outlines the importance and nature of leadership infrastructure and its role in societal mobilisation and includes discussion on the shared values and trusts that occur within and across societies as well as collective memory of previous pandemics. The second section explores three markers of sustained influence in relation to COVID-19, namely whether the threat from the virus was commonly felt, whether the leadership foundation provided a robust basis for societal mobilisation, and whether a previous experience of pandemic offered lessons for societal mobilisation? A brief conclusion then follows.

LEADERSHIP AND "SOCIETAL MOBILISATION"

The key features of 'societal mobilisation' as conceptualised in this paper (as opposed to social mobilisation) are noted here along with associated policy questions that those enacting such a mobilisation drive would inevitably need to ask and answer:

1). *The deployment of a whole of system response to the threat or crisis at hand*. Has it become necessary to stop or divert all resources – economic, social, politics, defence & security and human – to address the crisis?

2). *Sacrificing known ideals and sacred values to mitigate the threat to all*. Is there a general acceptance that significant curtailment of basic rights and privileges is necessary in order to protect society from an imminent or real threat?

[7] African Leadership Centre, COVID-19 Exploratory Research Notes, April 2020.

3). *Managing collective burden and not just loss of individuals or groups of individuals*. Are steps being taken to direct collective resources toward mitigating loss for all rather than just loss for a few (such as "bailouts" for employers to project jobs)?

4). *Enactment of emergency laws or regulations to implement new policy decisions*. Is there limited opposition across society to emergency laws or regulations?

5). *Treatment of all conditions above as temporary measures necessitated by crisis*. Is there a common perception that this is all a temporary arrangement, and that life will return to "normal" after the crisis or emergency situation?

6). *Forcing the rethinking of policies, approaches and priorities of government*. Is there a recognition or perception that policies, practices and ways of doing things will have to change or at least be re-evaluated in view of the crisis?

While it may be difficult to challenge societal mobilisation as outlined during periods of crisis, its success cannot be taken for granted. It might seem inconceivable that a community of people collectively threatened by imminent danger would choose not to abide by emergency measures designed to mitigate the danger that they face. There are several factors why this might be so. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many leaders and governments across global North and South struggled to achieve a reasonable degree of societal mobilisation while others succeeded. In essence, each leader had an opportunity to make a case that COVID-19 represented a vital security concern, which requires priority action and emergency resources.

This is akin to a *speech act* in securitization theory, which claims that a securitizing actor can pronounce something (in this case COVID-19), a security issue that poses an existential threat and should be dealt with through special measures outside the realm of normal politics.[8] Simply because an actor claims something is a security issue does not mean that it suddenly becomes one. There must be an acceptance of the speech act by an audience; and only then can there be a legitimate move towards adopting measures outside normal politics. While securitization theory has endured much criticism by critical security scholars[9] it is difficult to challenge the logic that when existential threats occur, those leading the response might claim these as a security concern that merit extraordinary measures. Successful securitization does not, however, lead to the successful mobilisation of other realms of society to deal effectively with the threat at hand. Securitizing actors may have the requisite 'position power' and capacity to declare emergency and mobilise necessary financial and other resources; but they might struggle to take other sectors of society along.

The evidence of the devastating impact of COVID-19 might lead one to assume that there would have been collective acceptance in society, of leaders' *speech acts* by the communities that were facing potential devastation from the pandemic. One could have been justified to think that when policies were put in place to support the full mobilisation of the society through the measures outlined above, each leader or government would enjoy unassailable success. But this was not the case. For example, New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam have all been noted as having had a citizenry that generally followed government instructions; whereas Italy, India and Russia had notable areas of the country and populace that were less complicit.[10] There were varying degrees of success and failure by leaders in all regions of the world – whether developed or less developed, democratic leaning or not, authoritarian or not.

[8] See, for example, Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, Security: *A New Framework for Security Analysis*, Lynne Reiner, 1998; Holger Stritzel, 'Towards a Theory of Securitisation: Copenhagen and Beyond', *European Journal of International Relations*, September 2007; Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Leonard and Jan Ruzicka, 'Securitization revisited: theory and cases', *International Relations*, August 2015; and Rita Abrahamsen, 'Blair's Africa: The Politics of Securitization and Fear', Alternatives 30, 1, pp. 50-80, 2005.

[9] Taureck, Rita. "Securitization theory and securitization studies." Journal of International relations and Development 9 (2006): 53-61; Lupovici, Amir. "The limits of securitization theory: Observational criticism and the curious absence of Israel." International Studies Review 16, no. 3 (2014): 390-410; Bertrand, Sarah. "Can the subaltern securitize? Postcolonial perspectives on securitization theory and its critics." European journal of international security 3, no. 3 (2018): 281-299.

[10] Russian parade defies pandemic as Putin stages power bid, BBC News, 25/06/20; Ray, Debraj, and Sreenivasan Subramanian. "India's lockdown: An interim report." In The impact of COVID-19 on India and the global order: A multidisciplinary approach, pp. 11-61. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2022; Sisto, Antonella, Livia Quintiliani, Flavia Vicinanza, Silvia Fabris, Laura Leondina Campanozzi, Giuseppe Curcio, Mirta Michilli et al. "Personal attitudes and denialist views about the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy: a national survey." Medicina e Morale 71, no. 2 (2022).

A society's prevailing leadership infrastructure is a test of its capacity for successful societal mobilisation

Leadership infrastructure, here, refers to a combination of the formal institutional elements of governing across realms; and the foundational relationships, shared values and expectations that underpin and reinforce these institutions across society. In essence, the former is the "hardware" of leadership infrastructure, the physical sites and ensembles in which institutionalised leadership is performed. Statehouses, parliaments, courthouses, corporations, palaces, and security establishments among others are all parts of the hardware of the leadership infrastructure. The latter – the underpinning relationships, shared values and expectations – are the "software" of leadership infrastructure. Notably, leadership infrastructure as described, applies to aspects and all levels of society although much attention is often paid to the concerns that connect a broad cross-section of a population.

Every society has a prevailing system for governing life in common. How power is organised and exercised – the operating system – is the foundational layer of the "software" of the leadership infrastructure. The nature of the relationships between those who preside over the systems supposedly organised for the collective good, and the rest of society, is also part of the software. There are also relationships underpinned by certain shared values, expectations and interests formed outside of the formally organised systems, which bind large segments of society and order their worldviews. This speaks to the existence of other bases of power within society. All of this is part of the software of leadership, which is expansive and as vital as the hardware, if not more. In the context of the Westphalian state model, the hardware component is more or less a constant, a core attribute of juridical statehood. The software component is ever variable and often underpins the difference in the quality and reach of developmental outcomes. Where these relationships (software) are not in tune with the hardware of leadership, we might find that there is a latent and competing leadership infrastructure. It might signal underpinning tensions and potential rupture.

Much exists in social science literature about the features of such systems across societies.[11] However, much attention (in political science in particular) is concentrated almost exclusively on the formal sites – the hardware – and less on the vastness and criticality of this software. In fact, leadership is little theorised as a phenomenon that is essential to societal survival and reproduction, without which governing is incomplete and inconsequential. It is treated as a side interest or issue; and seen as a buzz word by many experts.[12] Yet, in the world of practice, leadership is a "must have" in the everyday and not just "a desirable" even if the basis for this is not systematically examined. Some societies do well in the everyday because their leadership infrastructure keeps up with the daily routines of life. Other societies struggle. They lament the weakness of the available leadership infrastructure even in the everyday. Crisis situations often lay bare the state of the leadership infrastructure in a society and thus represent a window to observe and test the reality of societal mobilisation. This kind of understanding and focus on leadership hardware arguably contributed, for example, to what became a somewhat infamous 2019 Global Health Security Index that ranked the USA as the best country in the world in terms of pandemic preparedness, with the UK as number 2 and China as 51st. Yet the world saw clearly the vastly different outcomes in these places, where the fault lines within the leadership software in America and gross mistrust of government that was exploited and manipulated by a leader like President Trump (similar faults were exposed in the UK).[13]

To be clear, leadership (unlike management) is about dealing with uncertainty – situations that do not respond to routine management of the everyday – which cannot be accurately predicted. Governance and management in the everyday respond to known challenges and there is typically a tested system of response. Crises and responses to them, including the COVID-19 pandemic, fall squarely within the realm of

[11] See, for example, Jeffrey Kopstein and Mark Lichbach (eds.) *Comparative Politics: interests, identities and institutions in a changing global order*, Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, 2005. See also, various works in political philosophy including, for example, Thomas Hobbs (Leviathan), Plato's Republic; Emmanuel Kant's Perpetual Peace, among others.

[12] Garger, John. "Developing authentic leadership in organizations: some insights and observations." Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal 22, no. 1 (2007): 14-16; Humphreys, John H., and Walter O. Einstein. "Nothing new under the sun: Transformational leadership from a historical perspective." Management Decision 41, no. 1 (2003): 85-95.

[13] Global Health Security Index, October 2019: Building Collective Action and Accountability, available at https://ghsindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019-Global-Health-Security-Index.pdf (accessed 18/03/23); Rutledge, Paul E. "Trump, COVID-19, and the war on expertise." The American Review of Public Administration 50, no. 6-7 (2020): 505-511. The 2021 Global Health Security Index continues to rank the USA as number 1.

leadership. COVID-19 was an unknown and unprecedented crisis. This is what Keith Grint and other leadership scholars refer to as *vu ja de* (not seen before) rather than *de ja vu* (seen this before); and *wicked* problems.[14] Invariably, the state of a society's leadership infrastructure was the initial condition that shaped its capacity to mobilise the whole of the population to respond to a crisis that threatened everyone and many aspects of life at once. It offered the potential to sustain governing leaders' efforts to influence and convene the population to respond collectively and effectively to the crisis.

Shared values and binding relationships of trust in society outside of governing sites signal alternative leadership infrastructure that might support societal mobilisation

The software component of leadership infrastructure (leadership foundation) in a given society is essentially about relationship of trust between guardians and managers of the leadership hardware (governing bodies) and society, and among different groups in society. The evolution and sustenance of a relationship of trust is premised on shared values, experiences, collective burden, well-being common goals and cooperation. The prevailing state of the relationships (and the quality and quantum of trust) in the society is a vitally important factor when crisis erupts. The outbreak of COVID-19 required that the attention, energy and resources of the whole of society was brought to bear in order to prevent, interrupt or combat the outbreak of the disease. Whether or not a cross-section of the population had abiding trust in the existing systems and whether the managers of the formal systems of governance were trusted to exercise power for the common good, helped determine the degree of success in responding to the crisis. Key actors in this regard were political and/or social leaders whose actions and inactions could break the trust of the population if the quality and flow of information was poor or decisions about response to the crisis were not taken in a timely and transparent manner.

Where that trust is in deficit and the relationships between governing bodies and society is broken or dysfunctional, it is possible that other sites and relationships exist, which provide a semblance of an institutional frame around which trust coalesce in society. This is in essence an alternative or competing leadership infrastructure that may be crucial to societal mobilisation. During COVID-19, religious institutions, traditional rulers, youth groups, social movements, private sector, transnational groups, and paramilitary groups were all capable of becoming the focal points for societal mobilisation.[15] Faith-based organisations rallied to mobilise groups and disseminate information in Sri Lanka; and the (often maligned) Youth groups in South Sudan provided essential services and public information campaigns in South Sudan, as just two examples amongst a very great many.[16] The absence of either a prevailing leadership infrastructure which is robust or an alternative leadership infrastructure can be tragic for a society in a crisis moment. In extreme situations, this can open the door for non-state armed groups or actors previously deemed illegitimate, to emerge into leadership or fill extant vacuum if they are seen to be effective structures for societal mobilisation. Rebel groups in Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia, the Sahel, Colombia and many other areas all imposed lock down measures or increased coercive measures to combat the spread of the virus to various degrees of success.[17]

Collective memory of previous pandemics can be an important factor in societal mobilisation in response to COVID-19

[14] See Keith Grint, *Leadership: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2010; see also Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*: *Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, Harvard Business School, 2002.

[15] See for example: Boro, Ezekiel, Tanvi Sapra, Jean-François de Lavison, Caroline Dalabona, Vinya Ariyaratne, and Agus Samsudin. "The role and impact of faith-based organisations in the management of and response to COVID-19 in low-resource settings: Policy & practice note." Religion and Development 1, no. 1 (2022): 132-14; Dodd, Warren, Amy Kipp, Monica Bustos, Aliya McNeil, Matthew Little, and Lincoln Leehang Lau. "Humanitarian food security interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic in low-and middle-income countries: A review of actions among non-state actors." Nutrients 13, no. 7 (2021): 2333.

[16] Wijesinghe, Millawage Supun Dilara et. al. "Role of religious leaders in COVID-19 prevention: a community-level prevention model in Sri Lanka." Journal of religion and health 61, no. 1 (2022): 687-702; Lo Willa, Maggie. South Sudanese Youth Agency in a time of Covid-19, ALC COVID-19 Op-Ed Series, July 17 2020

[17] Bank, André, Yannick Deepen, Julia Grauvogel, and Sabine Kurtenbach. COVID-19 and violent actors in the global south: An inter-and cross-regional comparison. No. 329. GIGA Working Papers, 2022; Ali, Hassanein. "Covid-19 and Civil wars in the Arab world: the cases of Syria, Libya and Yemen." Asian Affairs 51, no. 4 (2020): 838-855; Ekzayez, Abdulkarim, Munzer Alkhalil, Preeti Patel, and Gemma Bowsher. "Pandemic governance and community mobilization in conflict: a case study of Idlib, Syria." In Inoculating Cities, pp. 61-80. Academic Press, 2024.

Arguably, whether or not a robust leadership infrastructure existed in a society, there was a potential to learn from a previous history of crisis and how it was managed. Some societies had encountered a crisis in their recent history of a similar nature to COVID-19. While the Spanish Flu of 1918 appeared to be a similar crisis it was a distant memory for today's generation of people. But HIV, Ebola, SARS and MERS are examples of crisis epidemics that have been experienced across many societies in more recent times. Certainly the memory of SARS is argued to have contributed to China and Asia's successes in the early stages of COVID-19; and is one of the factors cited for the comparative (and somewhat unanticipated) success in West Africa.[18] The responses to these crises may have existed in the collective memory of some societies, which became relevant in shaping that society's response. This collective memory of both the scale of suffering and the actions that worked well or not becomes an important factor in mobilising society even when the leadership infrastructure is weak.

KEY QUESTIONS – EXPLORING THE THREE MARKERS OF SUSTAINED INFLUENCE

There are three questions that are thus vital to researching and determining the degree to which successful societal mobilisation played a role in the varied COVID-19 experiences and outcomes that occurred across the world. Answers to these questions help to test and explain the capacity state leaders had to sustain influence for successful societal mobilisation around COVID-19 specifically but also other crises more generally. Each were also potentially important markers of sustained influence towards the goal of defeating coronavirus as the pandemic evolved.

I. Was the threat of coronavirus commonly felt across society?
II. Was there a leadership foundation (software) to support such comprehensive mobilisation? It is worth noting here that the focus of this question is the software aspect of leadership infrastructure, which encompasses the existing relationships. Simply focusing on the hardware and the role of these sites of leadership performance may not add much value to the discussion here. That is a well-trodden path covered in other places not least in daily news and analysis[19]. But the nature of the relationships between the managers of those sites and the rest of society might offer deeper insight while still bringing in some reference to the leadership hardware.
III. Was there a previous history of pandemic from which lessons of experience were drawn?

While there are notable differences in the approach to assessing leadership infrastructure at local and global levels, these questions remain relevant at all levels. When one applies these questions beyond society at local and national levels to inter-governmental institutions at regional and global levels, it is possible to undertake a leadership analysis to establish two things. The first, is whether countries experienced the coronavirus threat in the same way and at the same time and whether this provided a basis or not for collective action globally or regionally. Societal mobilisation at the global level could have potentially driven collaborative action for a range of response efforts including testing, manufacturing and distribution of personal protective equipment and collaborative research for cure and vaccine. The second is whether and how COVID-19 tested the global leadership infrastructure. Understanding the ways in which the hardware of the global leadership infrastructure engaged with concerns about Coronavirus is one aspect of this. The United Nations, World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank are examples in this regard. Identifying the robustness of the underpinning leadership foundation is another. Existing perceptions about the credibility of global institutions as well as the record of their previous engagement with the affected societies would be important factors to consider in this regard.

There is however complexity to the global leadership infrastructure given the variety of actors, levels of

[18] Impouma, Benido, George Sie Williams, Fleury Moussana, Franck Mboussou, Bridget Farham, Caitlin M. Wolfe, Charles Okot et al. "The first 8 months of COVID-19 pandemic in three West African countries: leveraging lessons learned from responses to the 2014–2016 Ebola virus disease outbreak." Epidemiology & Infection 149 (2021): e258; Qian, Licheng. "Making memory work: The SARS memory and China's war on COVID-19." Memory studies 14, no. 6 (2021): 1489-1502.

[19] Serikbayeva, Balzhan, Kanat Abdulla, and Yessengali Oskenbayev. "State capacity in responding to COVID-19." International Journal of Public Administration 44, no. 11-12 (2021): 920-930; Setyaningsih, Titik, Indra Bastian, Choirunnisa Arifa, and Fuad Rakhman. "Pandemic Leadership: Is It Just a Matter of Good and Bad?." Public Organization Review 23, no. 2 (2023): 605-621; Ganguly, Sumit et al. "World's worst pandemic leaders: 5 presidents and prime ministers who badly mishandled COVID-19." The Conversation. May (2021).

engagement, and the scale of interdependence. Complexity is core to global leadership. The ability to recognise and engage with this complexity is what makes global leaders easily distinguishable from others. This complexity combines features such as multiplicity, inter-dependence, ambiguity and flux.[20] The global nature of COVID-19 is evident, for example, in the many locations in which the impact of the virus was felt across the world, the degree of inter-dependence required across national boundaries seeking to bring greater understanding to the virus while collaborating to deal with the uncertainty and the rapid change created by its outbreak. It is interesting to note that the sources from which global leadership in this way were mostly demonstrated were not those connected to the hardware of the global leadership infrastructure such as the United Nations and the World Bank. Similarly, at the regional level, we saw limited exercise of leadership from the European Union, African Union, Economic Community of West African States, and others, at least at the early stage of the pandemic.

Global leadership infrastructure is, in reality, a super-hardware of the national level sites of leadership performance with indirect relationship-building with populations. The populations of member countries hardly felt the practical impact of these institutions. The sites of leadership performance and their managers achieved relatively little for the collective of their citizens. Rather, we saw global leadership demonstrated by actors operating outside of these sites. Communities of scientists and researchers collaborating across national boundaries to understand the virus and to respond to epidemiological uncertainty surrounding the virus, for example. The United Nations Security Council, meanwhile, was largely exposed as being inadequate and an inappropriate format for coordinating the global responses required for such a crisis (which does not bode well for the ever-encroaching climate crisis).[21] This (in)ability to mobilise the global community for a collective response is the key point of interest in this paper. The extent to which the leadership infrastructure of these institutions remained relevant to dealing with COVID-19 and, subsequently, the broader challenges of the 21st Century will be an important question to be asked going forward.

Exploring marker 1: Was the threat of coronavirus commonly felt?

Investigating and understanding the first marker for sustained influence - Was the threat of coronavirus commonly felt? Was the response collective? – requires analysis of the following:

- Was there a common understanding of what was at stake?
- Who articulated what was stake and who built a sense of common purpose?
- Was the experience and impact of the Coronavirus commonly and equally felt?
- Was everyone affected the same way?
- Was the loss for the collective greater than what was lost by the parts?
- Was everyone equally protected from the costs of collective action - loss of learning/ earning?

Whether or not leaders were able to pursue a shared vision and goals with people across their societies in response to the pandemic is a central leadership issue. This was quite unlike the realm of everyday life, when a leader's personality and their position might suffice as the sole asset they rely upon for governing. Leaders needed to build mutuality with the entire population in the search for an effective response to the coronavirus pandemic. Even when it was clear that no part of society was left untouched by this "equal opportunities infector," leaders were required to overcome two important challenges in seeking to ensure a collective response. One was facilitating a common understanding of what was at stake for society. The first responsibility for this must lie at the door of assigned leader(s). It is a function of vision and meaning-making. As Warren Bennis aptly notes in *Why Leaders Can't Lead*, the ability to articulate a vision to capture and manage society's attention is a crucial success factor.[22] So is the ability to manage meaning, of which effective communication is a key asset. Coronavirus no doubt captured society's attention by threatening ALL at once, albeit in different ways. The job of managing that attention and directing

[20] See, for example, B. Sebastian Reiche, Mark E. Mendenhall, Alan Bird and Joyce S. Osland, "What is Global Leadership?" *The World Financial Review*, March 2013, pp.24-27

[21] Charbonneau, Bruno. "The COVID-19 test of the United Nations Security Council." International Journal 76, no. 1 (2021): 6-16; Goodwin, Louise. "The UN security council and non-traditional security threats: Why the failures of the council's covid-19 response dampen hopes for council action on climate change." Victoria University of Wellington Law Review 53, no. 2 (2022): 251-280; Özler, Ş. İlgü. "The United Nations at Seventy-Five: Passing the COVID Test?." Ethics & International Affairs 34, no. 4 (2020): 445-456.

[22] Warren Bennis, *Why Leaders Can't Lead*: Unconscious Conspiracy Continues, Jossy Bass, 1989.

all toward safety from the virus, is entirely that of leaders – across the board.

A second challenge fell slightly outside the immediate control of leaders. It was whether the population's direct experience of the threat of coronavirus was to be equally and commonly felt. The virus was not experienced in the same way by all people in a society. Nor was it generally experienced, at least, not at the same time. Its spread to all locales was not considered inevitable; not everyone started out seeing this as a clear and present danger. This was due, in part, to its unknown and unprecedented nature. Lessons of its devastation had to be learnt from evolving experiences elsewhere.

Some seemed better prepared to deal with the attack due to the "lottery of life" and were thought to be sufficiently immune from COVID-19's fatal blow. It began with young people in some societies feeling that they were invulnerable, were not directly threatened and therefore did not all see much value in following guidelines. We now know that the elderly, people with pre-existing health conditions and those in lower socio-economic classes were more likely to succumb and that youth were not as immune to COVID-19 as initially thought. In any case, the population's perception and behaviour challenged leaders' capacity to mobilise collective effort. Again, how meaning is communicated went some way in dealing with this.

Leaders' ability to invoke a sense in the population, that the whole of society is under threat all at once by an invading force – in this case COVID-19 – was thus the first leadership test for all those at the helm of power. Whatever the context, a society or country confronted by COVID-19 faced a leadership moment. The extent to which society was able to collectively respond tended to determine every society's success. Ensuring that the collective moved as a society, to fight the common cause and not result in detriment to some but not others, was an important marker of sustained influence for successful societal mobilisation.

We have seen how across many societies and in rich and poor countries alike, leaders faced the challenge of convening their societies collectively around social distancing, isolation and lockdown. An important puzzle here was 'Why should those from lower socio-economic classes (and of course self-employed people), whose livelihoods cannot be secured and whose losses cannot be mitigated accept to stay home?' Poor people who seek a living on the streets on a daily basis are equally threatened by hunger and the virus. Street vendors across the developing world were forced to adapt and hustle their way through new lock down conditions imposed by them in ways that their wealthier middle class 'office worker' counterparts with savings were not; and meanwhile all workers in the UK received government 'furlough' payments, for example.[23] Successive collective mobilisation depended on the extent to which the detrimental impact of the proposed action could be addressed.

Exploring marker 2: Did the leadership foundation provide a robust basis for societal mobilisation?

Investigating and understanding the second marker for sustained influence - Did the leadership foundation provide a robust basis for societal mobilisation? – requires analysis of the following:

- What was the prevailing degree of trust? How widespread was the belief that people across society could be relied upon to act for the common good, if at all there was a shared purpose?
  - Was there a view that those tasked with managing the affairs of society would act for the common good?
  - Was there a sense that "all are in this together"?
- How binding was the mutuality held between leaders in assigned positions of authority and society?
  - Did the factors (e.g. identity) that mobilise citizens during elections work during crisis?
  - How did those for whom isolation and social distancing did not provide safety nets respond to leaders' calls for collective response?
- Were there widespread and binding relationships of trust elsewhere in society?

[23] Kiaka, Richard, Shiela Chikulo, Sacha Slootheer, and Paul Hebinck. ""The street is ours". A comparative analysis of street trading, Covid-19 and new street geographies in Harare, Zimbabwe and Kisumu, Kenya." Food Security (2021): 1-19; Turner, Sarah, Jennifer C. Langill, and Binh N. Nguyen. "The utterly unforeseen livelihood shock: COVID-19 and street vendor coping mechanisms in Hanoi, Chiang Mai and Luang Prabang." Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography 42, no. 3 (2021): 484-504; Szulc, Joanna Maria, and Rachael Smith. "Abilities, motivations, and opportunities of furloughed employees in the context of Covid-19: preliminary evidence from the UK." Frontiers in Psychology 12 (2021): 635144.

- Were there individual leaders, groups, exemplars, able to transcend the everyday, to facilitate societal mobilisation during crisis?

Sometimes those in assigned positions of authority in a society emerge into leadership during crisis moments because they clearly articulate vision and they communicate effectively to manage meaning for society. But the ability to mobilise society in a sustained way depends on the prevailing leadership foundations – the relationships and conditions that existed prior to the crisis. Leaders from across the world have distinguished themselves during the coronavirus crisis in the ways they have engaged their societies and communicated their vision, ideas and management of the crisis. Some examples included New Zealand, Germany, South Korea and South Africa among others. In a number of cases, there was residual surplus in the leadership foundation that readily complements the leaders' clear articulation of vision and the communication of meaning as seen in examples such as New Zealand and Germany.[24]

However, sustaining this influence depended on three underlying factors. The first is whether there was a prevailing trust in the pooling of the people and resources in society – a mutually held belief that others can be relied upon to act for the common good. Was there a sense of "we are all in this together" across society? A good determinant of this is the degree to which there is a trusted relationship between those in positions of authority and the people, which is not based on maximum coercion. Under such circumstances, there is a potential willingness by all to act and contribute to the common cause without recourse to extreme coercive measures by those asserting influence or a sustained resistance by those upon whom influence is being asserted. However, the leadership foundation was seen to be in deficit in many societies where and when the prevailing political or social order, and indeed the governing elite, do not represent or successfully manage the attention of a broad cross-section of their society. The degree varies. In some contexts, the governing machinery is said to have been "captured" by "rogue" elites that have usurped the space of the state to achieve their own selfish ends rather than ends that serve society well. Therefore, there is a prevailing trust-deficit that does not support collective working even when a phenomenon such as COVID-19 emerges, that posed an existential threat to the society. In such circumstances, leaders, even when they are well-meaning, struggled to take the whole of society along.

The second is the extent to which coercive power is used in responding to crisis situations, either to compel obedience or as a symbol of state presence and authority. Successful societal mobilisation would signpost a 'we are all in this together' mindset, meaning there is broad individual and collective awareness and consciousness, and willingness to abide by prescribed course. Coercion tends to indicate limited societal mobilisation and weak sustainability. Coercive power becomes noticeable either because leaders retreat to a leadership pattern that achieves easier and quicker results even if not sustainable or because the existing hardware cannot be adapted to the operating system and other software offered by leaders in response to the threat. In the Chinese example, for instance, it was a combination of a strong leadership infrastructure in terms of both hardware (strong state capacity) and software (societal trust and respect for authority) which led to early successes. Coercive force was only required, and eventually became over bearing, after continual lock downs even after the vaccine roll out periods became increasingly unpopular and trust diminished (interestingly, this then led to a quick lifting of all restrictions as Chinese leaders reacted to the increasing societal unrest).[25] We have seen elsewhere how the pillars of the existing leadership infrastructure – the hardware and software – can be incompatible or out of sync. This becomes apparent when the police and military, for example, which are not always wired to work for the common good do not act in tune with the narrative of the political leaders as they seek to build mutuality with the population. Leaders might communicate to the population in a message that strikes the right tone and build mutuality, yet the hardware is delivering a contradictory message as seen when law enforcement officers brutally attack citizens thought to be violating lockdown rules.

Thus, it becomes difficult for leaders, including those who have communicated a clear vision and intention that are well received by the populations, to manage trust in society when the other part of the leadership

[24] Gibson, John. "Hard, not early: putting the New Zealand Covid-19 response in context." New Zealand Economic Papers 56, no. 1 (2022): 1-8; Buthe, Tim, Luca Messerschmidt, and Cindy Cheng. "Policy responses to the coronavirus in Germany." The World Before and After COVID-19: Intellectual Reflections on Politics, Diplomacy and International Relations, edited by Gian Luca Gardini. Stockholm–Salamanca: European Institute of International Relations (2020).

[25] Jing, Yijia. "Seeking opportunities from crisis? China's governance responses to the COVID-19 pandemic." International Review of Administrative Sciences 87, no. 3 (2021): 631-650; China abandons key parts of zero-Covid strategy after protests, BBC News, 07/12/22

infrastructure is not in sync. In Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe, we saw how the security forces applied maximum coercion to enforce lockdown order from government.[26] In South Africa, we witnessed the coercive power of the police deployed in the townships even when President Cyril Ramaphosa was perceived as well-intentioned in his articulation of his government's strategy for managing the coronavirus.[27]

Third is the dynamic between governing bodies/elites and alternative sites and repository of trust in society in the context of societal mobilisation. Where trust breaks down between the governing elite and large parts of the population, we may find existing relationships of influence in other parts of society, built over time with underpinning mutuality. This has been found in some cases, for example, with religious leaders, artists, musicians, youth leaders, women leaders, business leaders, mainstream media houses and social media influencers. In India, Muslim and Hindu leaders promoted safety measures;[28] the famous tenor Andrea Bocelli performed a live-stream concert to boost morale in Italy;[29] and social media influences such as Jay Shetty and Nuseir Yassin (Nas Daily) used online blogs and platforms to promote COVID-19 measures.[30] These are examples amongst many. These alternative sources of influence and repository of trust exist because they embody and articulate the conditions, needs, and aspirations of society; they speak truth to power. The ability of the managers of the governing systems to collaborate with these actors who might not be in assigned positions of authority but are able to exchange influence across society, will become vital for achieving societal mobilisation. The ways in which this 'transfer of influence' happens is an important marker of sustained influence for societal mobilisation.

Exploring marker 3: Did a previous experience of pandemic offer lessons for societal mobilisation?

Investigating and understanding the second marker for sustained influence - Did a previous experience of pandemic offer lessons for societal mobilisation? – requires analysis of the following:

- Was there recent collective memory of crisis to be learned from in response to COVID-19?
  - What can we learn about the leadership infrastructure that prevailed during previous crisis?
  - What was different about the current leadership infrastructure in the context of COVID-19?
  - Was there societal mobilisation (and if yes, what pattern(s) did it follow) during previous epidemics?
  - What are the overall lessons about collective attitudes and behaviour during crisis?

Even with a robust and responsive leadership infrastructure, lessons could still be learnt from a previous experience of pandemics where possible. The existence of a pandemic in the "collective memory" of society may have offered a way forward particularly for societies with weak leadership infrastructure. While the Spanish Flu of 1918 was distantly felt in societies that were affected at the time, the experience of Ebola, SARS, MERS was relatively recent and has been shared by a generation of people. Drawing lessons about what worked well and what did not work helped a society adapt patterns of mobilisation that worked previously although this was not full proof in the new COVID-19 context.

Collective memory in this regard, concerns both institutional and societal recollection of the experience of the pandemic, the actions taken and their impact, the nature of cooperation, skills required, and resources used. Society often remembers the depth of the impact and scale of losses and their preventive and responsive

[26] Nkuubi, James. "When guns govern public health: Examining the implications of the militarised COVID-19 pandemic response for democratisation and human rights in Uganda." African Human Rights Law Journal 20, no. 2 (2020): 607-639; Onuh, Paul Ani. "Nigeria's response to COVID-19: lockdown policy and human rights violations." African Security 14, no. 4 (2021): 439-459; Nkomo, Benice Farai, and Owen Mangiza. "Civil 'disobedience'and images of war: The military and police in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe." The Dyke 15, no. 1 (2021): 131-149.

[27] Langa, Malose, and Bandile Bertrand Leopeng. "COVID-19: violent policing of black men during lockdown regulations in South Africa." African Safety Promotion: A Journal of Injury and Violence Prevention 18, no. 2 (2020): 116-126.

[28] Faith-based organizations across India step up the fight against COVID-19, WHO, 22/05/20;

[29] How Andrea Bocelli's Easter Live-Stream Became an Unexpected Global Blockbuster, Variety Magazine, 13/04/20

[30] Former monk Jay Shetty on how to remain calm, happy and present during COVID-19 pandemic, CNBC, 13/04/20; Virus Outbreak: Vlogger touts Taiwan's coronavirus performance, Taipei Times, 14/03/20

actions, what worked and what did not work. Institutional memory would be reflected in a variety of ways, including record of events and actions and lessons from that experience and how what worked well might be repeated. For this framing paper, collective memory of previous pandemics refers to two factors. One concerns the lessons that were learnt about the effectiveness of the leadership infrastructure of the time in mobilising society for response. A second and related factor was the degree to which people remembered the impact of the last pandemic/ epidemic and were ready to relearn the behaviour that might have helped prevent or manage COVID-19. Thus, those leading the governance system might have emphasised aspects of the software of leadership that were found to be most effective while the population might have willingly adapted to guidelines and regulations that improved public safety.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Different leaders and societies have residual features that vary from one place to another, prevailing leadership foundations, institutional features and attitudes to collective memory that might make or break them during times of crisis. The experience of coronavirus was not an exception. It laid bare the strengths and weaknesses of societies and leaders. New leaders and alternative repositories of trust emerged; and there was no hiding place for those who failed to live up to the challenges of the moment. Documenting the leadership lessons of processes of societal mobilisation in response to COVID-19, which represented a 'leadership moment' of epoch defining significance, will help scholars and students preserve this bit of history and draw lessons for the future.

This paper has contributed to this effort by providing a conceptual framework for subsequent research to take place. Here, a series of questions around 'markers of influence' have been noted that potentially provide a tool of analysis relevant for any case study research in any region of the world. They can also be adapted to any and all crisis moments that have required (or ones that could require in future) societal mobilisation. The leadership infrastructure in any given society is deep rooted and will influence the outcomes across a variety of leadership moments. But they are also changeable, over time, and researcher and practitioners should be mindful of their current status and how their condition may be improved in future.