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Letter to the Editor

COVID-19, economic impact and child mortality: A global concern

*Keys words:*

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World food program

Dear Editor

Recently it has been highlighted by ESPEN Council that the COVID-19 pandemic is posing unprecedented challenges worldwide. There is significant correlation between age and polymorbidity and these factors are independently associated with malnutrition and its negative impact on patient survival [1]. The COVID-19 outbreak has shattered the world's economic giants with an estimated loss of \$1 trillion during year 2020. This economic dent could have drastic effects on people living in extreme poverty [2]. As in year 2019 top donor countries of humanitarian aid and world food program were United States of America (USA), Germany, United Kingdom, and European Commission respectively (Fig. 1). Unfortunately these countries were badly hit by the COVID-

19 pandemic costing approximately 65, 000 lives so far [3]. As a result, economies of these countries are badly shattered and over 80 countries have already requested IMF for financial aid including USA and others. This economic dip will have a future impact on different humanitarian programs run by United Nations (UN) and other Non Profit Organizations [4,5].

Under nutrition cause 45% deaths in children less than 5 years of age. There are 49 million wasted, 17 million severely wasted and 149 million stunted children in the world [6]. As per World Bank's report nearly 783 million people in world live below the poverty line of US\$1.9 a day [7]. Most of these people have low standards of living and face lack of nutrition, stunt growth, high morbidity and mortality rate of infectious disease particularly in children [4,6].

Most countries of the world are under lockdown since second week of March, 2020 and this is causing food shortage in markets and prices inflation. A study has shown that inflation in food prices is directly linked with infant mortality rate in developing countries [8]. Children already facing under nutrition are now more vulnerable than ever and are currently under high risk of acquiring COVID-19. The children combating for food cannot afford to buy soaps, sanitizers and disinfection in those slums [6]. Furthermore,

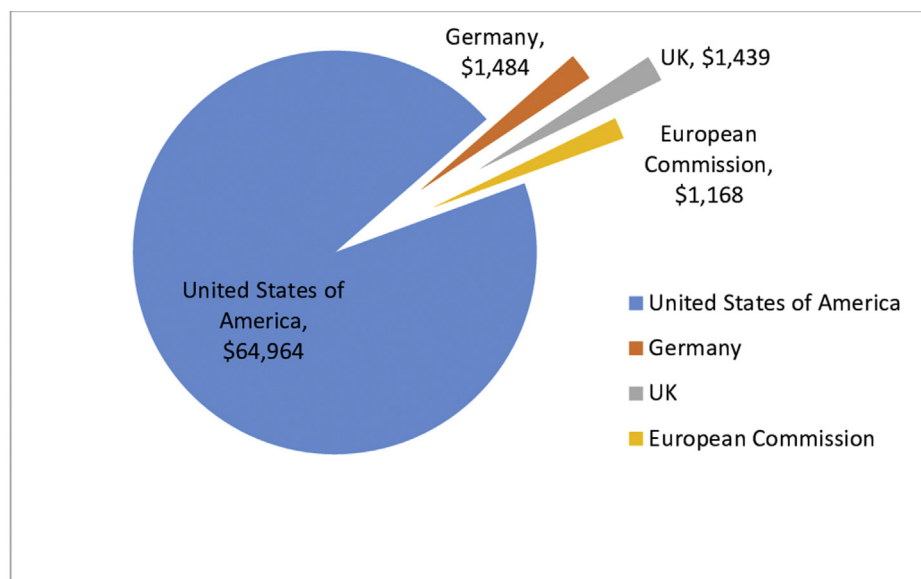


Fig. 1. Largest donors of humanitarian aid worldwide in 2019 [Data extracted from 3].

their governments are incapable of providing any precautionary equipment like soaps, masks or any testing facilities. Due to poor living conditions social distancing is also impossible. Another alarming factor is suspension of vaccination programs in these countries which makes the scenario worse [4,5,7].

In most of under developed and developing countries child health care programs are run by foreign funding under supervision of WHO and UNICEF. Till now 209 countries are hit by COVID-19 pandemic with 1.2 million positive cases and approximately 65,000 deaths [4,6]. This caused a halt in economic activities in all major sectors including food, travel, entertainment and fuel industry. All major donors of UNICEF and WFP are in an economic and health crisis and even seeking help from IMF for their own health and public welfare sector [3,5]. There are chances this will affect the humanitarian funding by these countries worldwide. Over 2 million lives of children are under high risk due to under nutrition in coming months [9].

The world has to make its choices very smartly in order to prevent any future human crisis. Appropriate deployment of funds, timely preventive measures and right initiatives can save millions of lives.

Ethical approval

Approval was not required.

Declaration of competing interest

All authors report no potential conflicts.

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