



BRIEFING MEMO: IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON HIGH- AND LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES WITH FEMALE LEADERS

An Introduction to the Memo

COVID-19 emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It has changed the world dramatically: shutting down schools, businesses, and even parts of the government. Governments have spent trillions of dollars in stimulus packages, but different countries around the world have responded differently, leading to some countries being more affected by COVID-19 than others. Women in leadership positions ensure that there is a strong response and focus on vulnerable populations. In response to the coronavirus, countries with female leaders took fewer risks, which meant that there were lower rates of infection in those countries.

Important Definitions

For the purpose of this document, the definitions of high- and low-income countries come from the designations of the World Bank which are calculated by gross national income. High income countries are ones defined by the World Bank as having a “gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$12,376 or more” (World Bank). Low income countries are countries that do not have a high enough GNI to be defined as a high-income country. This report analyzes data from three high income (Germany, New Zealand, and Finland) and three low income countries (Bangladesh, Serbia, and Bolivia). The death toll that will be referenced is an accurate measure as of 17 June 2020.

Germany: Chancellor Angela Merkel

Important Background Information

- The PM is a physicist, chief of staff is a doctor, listened to experts, made well informed decisions
- Citizens have a high level of public confidence in the state and its leaders
- There is a spirit of cooperation across the political spectrum
- Germany has a well-funded public healthcare system, extensive testing capabilities
- 8910 deaths reported out of a population of 83 million
- First case in January, shut down public life in March for 6 weeks, relatively under control in April
- Ramped up testing earlier than most countries, shut down public life in March
 - o “Track and trace” system of contact tracing stalled the spread (BBC)
- Although initially high case rate, Germany has slowed down the rate
- More in control than other countries with similar rates of infection

New Zealand: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

Important Background Information

- The PM has a background in communications
- Briefings every day from Director-General of Health Dr. Ashley Bloomfield
- PM Ardern very open and authentic with her Facebook Livestreams
 - o Sympathized with citizens and explained the necessity of the lockdown
- Clear message of unification against the virus brought the country together
 - o “Unite Against COVID-19” with “our team of five million” (BBC)
- NZ is a small nation and has easily sealable borders
- 22 deaths out of a population of 4.8 million
- Put the country in very strict lock-down early; there were only 6 cases in the country
- Full lockdown meant that they had time to do testing, contact tracing and manage their borders

Briefing Memo

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Finland: Prime Minister Sanna Marin

Important Background Information

- The PM is very young (34 years old)
 - o Motto was “test, trace, isolate, and treat” (Reuters)
- Advanced healthcare system in place with efficient digital tools
- Finland had stockpiles of medical equipment such as masks and ventilators
- 326 deaths out of a population of 5.5 million
- Responded early with online symptom checker
- March 16: containment measures and national state of emergency
- Early April: randomized antibody testing
- Rank at the top in international measures of women’s equality (World Economic Forum)
- Social media influencers spread accurate information about the coronavirus
 - Reached her younger audience

Bangladesh: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Important Background Information

- Hard to social distance due to close living quarters, reliance on public transportation
- No regular supply of water in slums and scarce sanitization facilities
- Severe shortage of testing kits and PPE, even after China donations
- 1305 deaths out of a population of 164 million people
- March 8: first case, closed schools and encouraged nonessential businesses to go online
- Suspended all flights from Europe
- Women have an important role in planning/implementation, some act as community leaders
 - Want to maintain sanitation infrastructure (pipes, soap dispensers) even after coronavirus
- PM Hasina taking steps to “tackle inequality and support the poor” (World Economic Forum)

Serbia: Prime Minister Ana Brnabić

Important Background Information

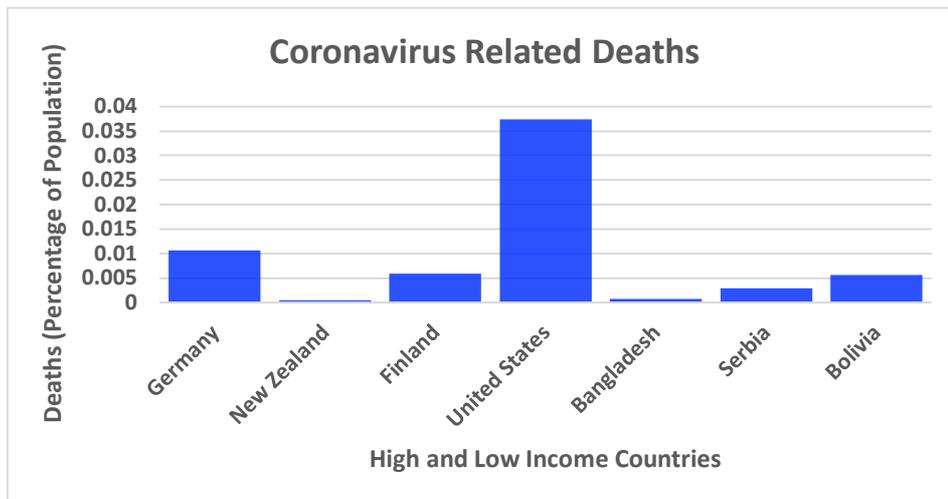
- Insufficient PPE and medical equipment to combat a virus of this magnitude
- 257 deaths out of a population of 8.7 million
- Didn’t take the disease seriously enough, insufficient reaction at first
- Brnabić named head of the Health Crisis Committee
- March 6: first case, March 16: national state of emergency, closed borders
 - Closed schools, reduced public transportation, implemented curfew
- China supplied Serbia with medical aid, filling an opening left by the EU
- Chinese lab built in Serbia to increase testing and is carrying out 2000+ tests/day
 - Symbol of “iron friendship” between Serbia and China (Reuters)

Bolivia (President: Jeanine Áñez)

Important Background Information

- Healthcare system not strong, needed PPE and medical equipment
- 659 deaths out of a population of 11.7 million
- \$170 million from World Bank to strengthen healthcare system
- Acted before the first case was detected
 - Hotlines by Ministry of Health to inform citizens about symptoms, answer questions
- March 10: first case, March 12: closed public schools, flights to Europe cancelled
- Prohibited large public gatherings (more than 1000 people)
- Áñez formed an Emergency Operating Committee, with officials from the World Health Organization and other health organizations across Bolivia

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Conclusion/Recommendations

In general, high income countries tend to have more resources for testing and prevention. Even though the numbers show that lower-income countries have a lower death rate, this is most likely due to the lack of accurate testing available in these countries. Even after accounting for lack of testing, the US has a much higher death rate than the other six countries and the US could learn a lot from these countries. In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, nearly half of those surveyed believe that the US can learn a lot from other countries on how to combat the coronavirus effectively. There has been a very inconsistent response to the coronavirus because public health officials and politicians are not working together to help the country overcome this crisis. Politicians in the US, at the local and national level need to listen to health experts and continue to enforce quarantine measures in order to slow down the spread of the disease.

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