

Ominous Omicron

THE VARIANT INVITED BY
OUR INHUMANITY

One-Pager
Omicron-Series

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THE ISSUE AT STAKE

WE MUST ASK OURSELVES; DO WE STILL NOT VALUE ALL LIVES EQUALLY?

Just as the world began glimpsing the light at the end of the tunnel of an arduous battle against the COVID-19 pandemic – bolstered by the development of several highly efficient vaccines – a new variant of “high concern” as designated by WHO has emerged. And, while the debate continues to rage about the origins of SARS-CoV-2 and how much of it, if any, was human influenced, there should be no doubt that humans shoulder the lion’s share of the blame for the emergence of the Omicron variant. The abhorrent inequalities in vaccine distribution, despite initiatives like COVAX, have resulted in about 3.64Bn, almost 50% of the global population remaining unvaccinated, mostly in low-income countries while wealthy countries march into providing booster shots. We must ask ourselves; do we still not value all lives equally? And, what, if not a resurgent global pandemic, will awaken our humanity?

WHY IT MATTERS?

→ Pandemics always end.

Vaccines were never the reason global pandemic subsided historically. These are facts(1), and while they ought to invite comfort, they should not encourage complacency. Almost a year to date, the UK became the first country to grant temporary regulatory approval for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine(2), with the rest of Europe soon following suit. It ushered a period of hope globally that better days lay ahead in the battle against COVID-19. That last statement however only rang true for the developed and wealthy nations. For middle and low-income countries, another cycle of dependency on the benevolence of wealthy nations emerged. Vaccines are created by pharmaceutical companies and given the mass devastation the pandemic caused to global markets, investors began relying on these companies to offset their losses elsewhere. Meaning, any hopes for vaccine formula sharing were slim to none. Thus, wealthier nations get to hoard vaccines, and only at their discretion do they decide to distribute vaccines to their less affluent counterparts. Indeed, COVAX, a global program to distribute Covid vaccines, has continuously slit its projection for doses in 2021 due to faltering production, banning exports, and hoarding vaccines.

This has resulted in about 45% of the world not being vaccinated(3), with only 0.7% of doses available being administered in low-income countries. Omicron was first detected in Africa, a continent where only 6% of the population is fully vaccinated(4). This flagrant inequality in vaccine distribution is unjust but not inexplicable. Is there any plausible justification for this?

FII INSTITUTE'S VIEW

→ The FII Institute would like to acknowledge that while disparities have been perennial throughout humanity’s history, not all inequalities are created equal. There are five types of social inequalities(5), the worst of which, both in terms of morality and potential for global impact, is treatment inequality. These inequalities always tend to skew harsher towards lower-income countries. Evidence demonstrates just how devastating the COVID-19 pandemic has been as a catalyst of exacerbating many prevalent inequities(6). The institute bewails how certain inequalities like wealth, food availability, education and employment access among others have become so deeply ingrained in our humanity that each of us doesn’t feel appalled by them daily. However, while many of those epidemic

inequities mostly result in endemic consequences, vaccine inequality, as being proven with the surge of the Omicron variant, has the potential to have calamitous global ramifications.

It is with this foresight that the FII Institute created its Global Infectious Disease Index. A tool that actively tracks more than 60 active pathogens to assess both endemic and pandemic burdens on a worldwide scale. The tool was designed to use data driven insights to prevent future pandemics. However, while the tool can advocate for informative decision, it cannot be fully utilized while national interests precede the needs of humanity. The FII institute asserts that leaving half the world unvaccinated while some countries roll out third doses is a debilitating and deliberate direction that will set all of us back in our battle against COVID-19. Aristotle once stated, “The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal.” We can no longer only aim to seek parity between the unvaccinated and those fully immune. We should prioritize the unvaccinated and urgently seek to vaccinate the unvaccinated. For, all lives should be equal. The virus, and its variants, don’t discriminate. It is time humanity starts doing the same.

ABOUT FII INSTITUTE

→ FII INSTITUTE is a new global nonprofit foundation that has an investment arm and one agenda: Impact on Humanity. Global, inclusive and committed to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles, we foster great minds from around the world and turn ideas into real-world solutions in five critical areas: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotics, Education, Healthcare and Sustainability. We are in the right place at the right time: when decision makers, investors and an engaged generation of youth come together in aspiration, energized and ready for change. We harness that energy into three pillars: THINK, XCHANGE, ACT. Our THINK pillar empowers the world's brightest minds to identify technological solutions to the most pressing issues facing humanity. Our XCHANGE pillar builds inclusive platforms for international dialogue, knowledge sharing and partnership. Our ACT pillar curates and invest directly in the technologies of the future to secure sustainable real-world solutions. Join us to own, co-create and actualize a brighter, more sustainable future for humanity.

→ This Thought Piece was produced by the THINK Pillar at the FII Institute.

In THINK we believe that “By integrating what is desirable from a human point of view with what is technologically feasible and economically viable, we can create the solutions for a better world”

At the FII Institute, our mission is to empower the brightest minds for all, with all to create a positive global community for all. This is the heart of THINK's strategy in that we do this, through building a global momentum to impact change, working with esteemed partners and building our thought leadership to ensure that we focus on impacting humanity positively.

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