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# Vaccines, water must be ensured for all

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THE surging number of nations clamouring for Covid-19 vaccines, which is tilted in favour of affluent countries, presents a deep sense of violation of the long-standing tradition of international solidarity initially shown to tackle the rapid spread of the deadly coronavirus.

Although this seems to be motivated by the desire to save their citizens' lives, the preoccupation of these wealthy nations to be the first in line to snatch up a significant amount of vaccines appears to stem from individualistic tendencies that have in turn given rise to vaccine nationalism. This takes place in the wake of unprecedented spread of the second wave of the virus which has wreaked havoc across the world economy.

Any semblance of international co-operation to tackle the spread of the virus has since given way to a race to secure as many as possible vaccines on

the strength of economic muscle while the rest of the weak economies face a bleak future. This spells a humanitarian crisis as the virus persists to tighten its grip throughout the world.

As wealthy nations continue to buy up millions of doses of vaccines, there should be an increasing concern about many poor countries that have not been able to negotiate bilateral deals with vaccine manufacturers. These countries face a grim reality that some of their citizens will not be able to receive the vaccines, effectively condemning them to death.

It is in this context that the World Health Organization should push forward with the Covax international vaccine initiative as a global purchasing mechanism to ensure that the poor countries do not miss out on the vaccines. All nations should throw their weight behind making sure that a country's buying power is not a determining factor in accessing vaccines.

There is more than enough evi-

dence to show that no one country can shield itself from the impact of the coronavirus. This health crisis calls for international co-operation, the marshalling and sharing of resources in order to defeat the virus.

To emphasise this point, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said for the world to recover faster, it had to recover together because it is globalised: the economies are intertwined.

Equally accurately, the same logic needs to be ingrained in the psyche of the haves and the have-nots with regards to accessing water resources. South Africa's water resources continue to be under serious strain and access to them is an emotive issue that pits communities against each other.

It is against this backdrop that the Department of Water and Sanitation firmly believes that equity in accessing water is one of the cornerstones of development. It recognises the fact that for the longest of time, some

sections of our population, and mostly poor and from far-flung places, had no access to water and continue to experience lack of water. This means that they had no means to eke out a living decent living and have to contend with hard conditions that life throw at them.

It should be recognised that the more collective and co-operative efforts are made to change the face of every sector of our societies, the lesser would be the appeal to be in the front of the queues to be the first to secure the most basic necessities of life to the detriment of those without the means to stockpile them.

It is only through ensuring that every member of a nation or a community enjoys a degree of access to life-giving necessities that we can emerge stronger at the end of any crisis.

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