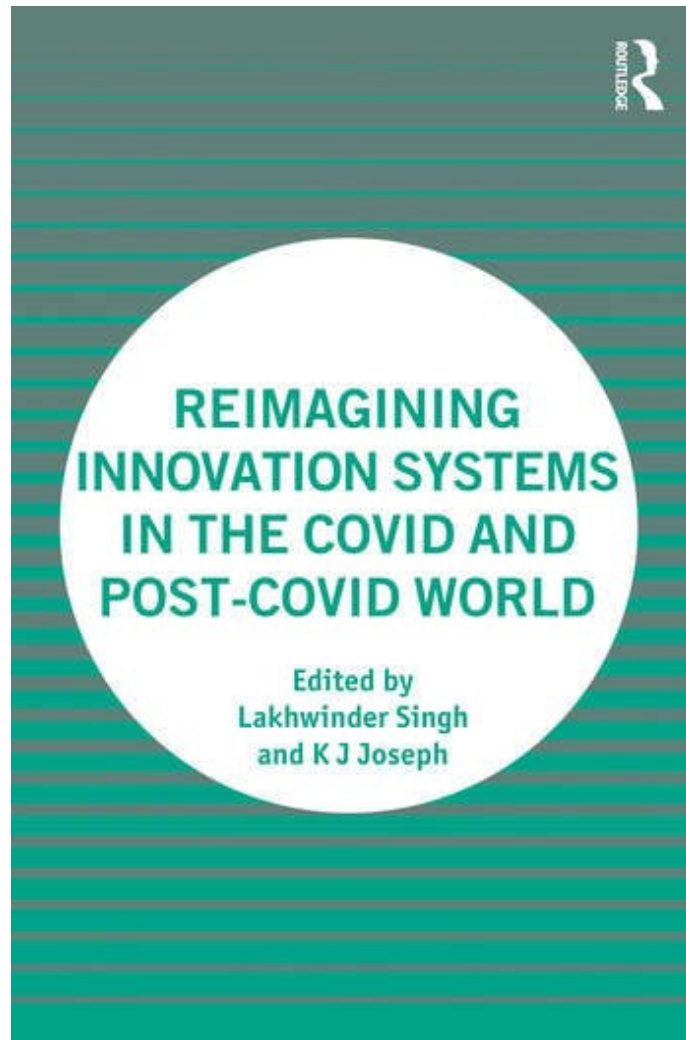


# Reimagining Innovation System in the Covid and Post-Covid World



**Reimagining Innovation System in the Covid and Post-Covid World.** Edited by Lakhwinder Singh and K J Joseph. India: Routledge 2023. ISBN 9781032633855.

This edited volume by Lakhwinder Singh and K.J. Joseph two scholars who have been at the forefront of innovation studies in India and instrumental in founding the India Network for Learning Innovation and Competence Building Systems (IndiaLICS). The regional chapter of the Global Network for Learning Innovation

and Competence Building Systems developed through open discussion among North-South scholars Christopher Freeman, Richard Nelson, Jose Cassiolato, Mammo Muchie, Luc Soete, Bengt-Ake-Lundvall, Shulin Gu in 2002 and has evolved as a major network on innovation, economy and development studies involving more than 3000 scholars worldwide.<sup>[1]</sup>

The book is an intervention about reimagining innovation systems in the post-pandemic world. The diversity of papers from various regions is one of the book's highpoints with chapters focusing on countries of Asia, Africa and South America. The book consists of three parts: Part I: Challenges to Innovation System in Uncertain Times comprises four chapters. Part II:



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Response of the Innovation System in COVID-19 Crisis, has five chapters and Part III: Critical Perspective on Innovation Policy in the Context of COVID-19 Crisis with seven chapters. In total the book has fifteen chapters and an introduction and a conclusion.

The Preface sets the pace of the book which is premised on the two major strategies adopted by most nation-states globally on the face of the Covid-19 pandemic: (a) invigorating healthcare systems along with vaccination and (b) controls such as lockdowns, social distancing, masks etc. The introduction of the book starts with of the pandemic's impact on global economy, development and the need to rethink innovation. What struck me was seemingly the distinction being made between 'innovation' and 'inclusive innovation'. (pg. X). The editors state that, "there is reason to believe that the adverse impact of lockdown driven by loss of employment and income would have been higher on those less privileged adding another layer of inequality. An issue of concern for inclusive innovation scholars." (pg. X). It asserts for robust social welfare mechanisms. Now why I say this is critical is not simply because every innovation must be for human-good rather that the primary objective of innovation must be its availability to all.

Inclusion with effective participation must be the underlining criteria for innovation globally.<sup>[2]</sup> Innovation without inclusion essentially becomes centralized in the hands of corporate monopolies and these have long-term consequences for human society. While worldwide reaction of states to the COVID-19 pandemic was national lockdowns, it was a step taken by politicians and bureaucrats without keeping in mind millions of workers who struggled to go back home due to ceiling of internal borders leading to chaotic situation responsible for not only loss of employment but loss of precious lives.

The book claims that fatality rate remained higher in the developed world and middle-income countries but surprisingly low in the developing countries. This may have been correct in the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic but as the pandemic progressed, deathrates expounded in developing countries with India and Brazil topping the list of deaths and caseload. The United States of America ranked first among developed countries with highest caseload of the COVID-19 according to 2021 data.<sup>[3]</sup>

**Part I:** Lundvall's chapter set the stage where he argues that technological monopolies not only provide direction to innovation but is effective in giving shape to health, climate change and education. Rasiah underlines four pillars: material development, environment, access to health and socio-economic equality. De Fuentus's chapter too talks of four elements: knowledge and capacities, existing innovation system, capacity to design and implement Science Technology policy and inclusion of multiple stakeholders and global connectivity. The last chapter in this part, by Swati Mehta and Lakhwinder Singh analyses innovation system and challenges in Asia argues that Asian countries have

performed better due to cooperation and coordination among them.

**Part II:** The co-authored chapter by Joseph and Kakarlapudi titled *Innovating out of COVID19 Pandemic: Whither Developing Countries*, highlights the knowledge and development divide, focusing on inclusive innovation system questioning the sustainability of hyperglobalization. The chapter by Chaturvedi, Kumar and Saha articulates the framework of integrated innovation system by elaborating on initiatives taken by the Indian state. Rasigan Maharajah justifies his argument of political economy's interrelated-ness with innovation discourses by studying the 55 African states five regional economic communities. Focusing on monopoly and IPR contradictions and moral imperative to save human lives, Bhattacharya's chapter, shows the vulnerability of nations and argues for the OECD countries as model of best practices. Social welfare mechanism challenging the capitalist-corporate nexus in developed countries.

**Part III:** elucidates on case studies from various countries such as Germany, Brazil, Costa Rica, India, Kenya and South Africa. It measures capacity of state and the critical role of effective and inclusive governance. Underlining the contradictions of public policy and the chapter in developmental activities pre and post the pandemic while how the reversal of the state to take measures of saving lives get intertwined with curtailment of individual freedoms. Walz and Lastres and Cassialato's chapters on Germany and Brazil, respectively, focuses on the centrality of sustainability, criticism of decontextualized knowledge, relevance of public service with well-being and essential services at its core. Orozco's chapter on Costa Rica urges to shift innovation from industry to individual with explosive advancement of digitalization and its impact seeking a reactivation. Abrol highlights the paradoxes in the Indian STI Policy where under the garb of self-reliance, monopolization has been promoted. He argues for a reinvention of public policy while Kruss emphasizes on upgrading the coalition-centered on inclusive development, integration of informal sectors, supply chain and opportunity driven enterprises in South Africa. Numi *et al.* on Kenya narrates the development of digital technology in Kenya and the impact of COVID-19 while reiterating towards an inclusive digital system network.

The critical takeaways from the volume are the prioritization of a Global Innovation System and regional and international cooperation beyond borders which the book underlines as salient for facing future pandemics. While the book is an important contribution on comparative studies of the impact of the pandemic on innovation system, it misses certain crucial points. (i). Missing the political: What do I mean by it? The book does hints at the role of leadership, need of greater state response and investment in public health but falls short of a critical lens. The book misses on the role of states with rise of authoritarianism during and after the pandemic leading to attack on civil rights

and liberties, othering of minorities. Arguments focusing on data manufacturing by populist states agencies and innovative techniques to combat false datafication in the aftermath of the pandemic could have added to an imperative factor affecting human populations understanding of pandemic and other such challenges. (ii) The book does elaborate on increased inequalities due to the pandemic and slump in per capita income, budget allocation to public healthcare. Though in terms of amount the budget in most countries has gone up but a close look at the healthcare budget and relative allocation to healthcare by the state has staggered in most Global South countries with around 2 percent of the total GDP being allocated for public health expenditure by most Global South countries.<sup>[4]</sup> This leads to a substantial out-of-pocket expense on health by individuals and households adversely affecting the population. (iii). Another influential factor i.e. the role of information and communication critical in times of crisis has not been dealt with in the volume. Information and crisis communication in indigenous languages and lack of outreach among certain indigenous communities and information dissemination among linguistic minorities in their language led to an 'unequal pandemic'.<sup>[5]</sup> (iv). The role of local media has not been focused while we have witnessed a chopping of local newspapers/radio/ pamphlets and journals in regional languages due to financial crunch, it was the use of social media and radio by minority community groups which reached out to the indigenous population in their mother tongue languages

providing critical information on the pandemic. (v). Impact on education and environmental changes initiated by the state's nexus with private corporates as the primary objective in many countries.

Most case studies are at a macro level/national level. The pandemic appeared rather very different from below and hence empirical studies at the micro level could have elevated the arguments presented by the book. Furthermore, many unknown innovations happen at the grassroot as people often are at their innovative best when they face scarcity. Overall, the book is an important contribution to rethink and reimagine innovation from the lens of uncertainty that the world faces due to climate change, disease, destruction of environment and global issues of poverty, conflicts on one hand and rising monopolization of resources in private hands, on the other.

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**Reviewed by**  
**Papia Sengupta**

Centre for Political Studies, School  
of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru  
University New Delhi-110067, INDIA.  
Email: [papiasg@mail.jnu.ac.in](mailto:papiasg@mail.jnu.ac.in);  
[papiasg@jnu.ac.in](mailto:papiasg@jnu.ac.in)  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8160-0344

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