

Restarting Business: Crisis Response & Long-term Opportunity in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic

- Invitation for Recommendations

Contingency Intelligence & Response Agency (CIRA) in concert with the University of Colombo is currently in a dialogue with stakeholders to advocate for urgent action to mitigate adverse effects of Covid-19 while also advocating to seize 'crisis opportunity'. Findings will be submitted to the Government.

Discussion Statement

The infinite conveyor belt of the world's factory of wealth creation has come to a grinding halt! Covid-19 has brought the business world to its knees. Economies may be collapsing in a heap as the world heads to a depression of catastrophic proportions.

That's one side of the coin!

The other side may not just save us from gloom but may present a course correction that would lead to a better, cleaner and more equitable socio-economic landscape. That's if we collectively understand and make good of the lessons and opportunities arising out of the global pandemic of Covid-19!

As we go into plans boards it is pertinent that we first separate the problem from the opportunity. **Hence, the discussion is divided into two aspects:**

- 1) Responding to the immediate crisis resulting in business interruptions and lockdowns.
- 2) Understanding the opportunities to correct-course in creating a more equitable business landscape by revisiting policies, practices and shortcomings and make good use of 'crisis opportunity'.

There is an important third element that would ensure success of both the above:

- 3) Bridging the first two points through an analytical examination, reaching conclusions which would amount to far-reaching actions and mechanisms.

Action Outline Below.

Action Outline

The assignment involves building a case for proposal points stated below. Please keep prognosis simple, focused and preferably as a guideline for execution by the Government in order to facilitate swift implementation.

New ideas/suggestions which can be validated may be introduced by adding as new points where applicable.

For the government of Sri Lanka, the current debacle presents an invaluable opportunity to correct course. The current 'crisis-opportunity' involves the following areas:

Crisis Business Intervention Proposal

Business Resuscitation

1. Set guidelines for pay-cuts and redundancy and promote guidelines to restarting business.
2. Possibility of temporary relaxation of labor laws, offering concessions to employers to remain afloat. Work out guidelines to prevent abuse.
3. State support mechanism for employers, as well as, employees with the primary criterion being survival for both parties.
4. Temporary loan suspension | mid-term loan restructuring/reorganizing
5. Concessionary stipulations on business premises rents/leases charged by landlords.
6. State sponsorship/promotion of co-working space for small offices on concessionary rates in order to mitigate rental expenditure.
7. A mechanism to encourage self-employment opportunities in expanding sectors and in the supply chain in order to redress unemployment.
8. Psychological support center for both employers and employees. Study the feasibility of initiating business/job bank with electronic matching.

Crisis Opportunity

- 1)** A regime for continuation of work from home, facilitating cost-cutting and social distancing for next 12 months. Social distancing may be here to stay for a longer period. Therefore, mechanisms should be perused in setting up a new culture of 'working from home' wherever possible. Limited number of essential employees needed in the office physically needs to be identified while all others requiring to work from home under proper supervision and reporting. Introducing staggered working hours too may be considered. Meeting could be continued on audio/video conferencing as a continuing practice.

- 2)** Decentralization of State departments hasn't really happened the way it should. Ask all establishments including the private sector to operate under new demographics. This may be an invaluable opportunity to build the future city of Hambantota and develop all other areas as well. We may need to look at a new admin paradigm. Re-assigning employees to areas which also facilitates the education of their children holds plenty of promise, going forward.

- 3)** Diversification for industries in hiatus and will remain non-functional for a considerable period of time by way of a Business Incubator and creating a new supplier network to expand businesses in demand and/or to expand existing large businesses through broadening of supply chain.

- 4)** A business migration mechanism to move into expanding sectors like agriculture and local food production.

- 5)** Perusal of 'crisis opportunity' in the global market and preparing the way for local businesses to respond to the demand.

- 6)** Action plan to maximize oceanic resources through creation of catching and packing sea vessels.

- 7)** Identification of components | appliances | raw material in demand and has been affected due to import restrictions and initiating a plan for new local manufacturing by channeling existing factories, as well as, encouraging diversification. Should we not look inward as pitfalls of globalization cast a gloom? Perhaps, a better balancing act? While the world is healing we have also been forced to cut our import bill. On the other hand, shortages will loom. Can we explore identifying

new industries and empowering local productions under the blanket of the Covid-19?

- 8) Identify value-addition, resourceful business amplification i.e. new products in demand | converting hotels into up-scale offices | resorts into high-tech crop incubators | pooling excess vehicles and shipping to African continent to tap into thriving market.
- 9) E-commerce is a life-saver today and we may be able to train a fair quota of the population to order online or on the phone, again cutting down traffic, resources and the need for close human contact.
- 10) This is also a great opportunity to introduce vehicle distancing/policing – your ideas?
- 11) Identification of natural inland resources and setting up a well-orchestrated system of tapping into same giving due consideration to sustainable goals.

Global Value Creation

- 12) Opportune and timely promotion of the Island as a well-being | healing destination.
- 13) Market Sri Lanka's acclaimed response to crisis management | humanitarian ops by creating a new organization ready to respond to global emergencies.
- 14) Mechanism for greater equity participation in troubled SMEs by offering a gateway to bring back large sums of money parked outside our shores.
- 15) Resource center | multi-media campaigns to support new idea/opportunity creation.

Conclusion

Considering that this is a time-crucial intervention, quick turn-around will be appreciated. Your contribution is appreciated and credited.

Please mail your document to: cira.geo-explore.org



Developing global and national events mute testimony to the all-important need for disaster preparedness by way of an all-encompassing strategy which governments alone cannot do and calls for wider involvement.

Contingency Intelligence & Response Agency (CIRA) is a think-tank and catalyst for an overarching disaster response mechanism in SAARC countries bringing scientific research, international cooperation and private sector resources together in support of the governments to be 'crisis-ready'.

Headquartered in Sri Lanka, CIRA will develop a base model in Sri Lanka while seeking to bring in regional partners to the task force. The SAARC Development Fund, University of Colombo and Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Industry are among CIRA's partners in this exhaustive and challenging mission.

CIRA's mandate is to develop an overarching disaster prevention, mitigation and management protocol so that governments can respond to evolving and dynamic situations and needs through a structured, responsive and relevant mechanism.

Contingency Intelligence & Response Agency

380/97, Sarana Road, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka.

t: 94 11 7399000-3 | f: +94 11 4527781