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# COVID-19 AND SECURITY-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS: VIETNAM'S PERSPECTIVES

**ABSTRACT:** Covid-19 is considered as an important factor that impacts largely on the security and development. Covid-19 has caused the shift in the definition of the national security and significance of new emerging non-traditional security issues, for instance the health security, and human security. Accordingly, Covid-19 has had devastating effects on the poor and human development, due to the economic recession and diversion of resources to focus on coping with the virus, stressing the accomplishment of sustainable development goals. It is anticipated that the entanglement of security and development issues gives rise to more complex challenges to ensure the stability and progress of sustainable economic development.

This context has raised a question of how countries, especially lower middle-income countries like Vietnam, could cope with arising challenges and opportunities in the new context. This research concludes that Vietnam, as a perfect case study, has strongly supported global and regional cooperation to reset development agenda to focus on quick economic recovery towards resilient, green inclusive, and sustainable development. Internally, Vietnam was successful in controlling the pandemic, and become one of few countries that achieved positive GDP growth in the region in 2020. The key to overcome these challenges remains with the Communist Party of Vietnam's strong political leadership to control Covid-19, and to take advantages of development trends such as globalization, shifting of supply chain, digital economy, and green recovery and green growth.

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## INTRODUCTION

While the topic about the nexus of security and development has been discussed for a long time, since 1990s, the transformation of the security-development nexus of Covid-19 from perpsectives of developing countries, particularly Vietnam, has been preliminary discovered. Recent studies have focused more on relationship between non-traditional security and development, for instance, the water-health-food-economy nexus and its affects on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sub-Saharan Africa. The root problem underlying the inequity in the health, water food and economic sectors is addressed to prepare for people in resource-poor settings to ensure sustainable development (Joshua, 2020). Some scholarly discussions in Europe have emphasized on "strong component of security in developing countries" embedded in development (Shiferaw, 2020). In cases of countries such as Bangladesh, the humanitarian-development-peace nexus has been emphasized to deal with long-term needs of vulnerable people (Rieger, 2021).

However, there are few studies regarding the transformation of the nexus of security and development in developing countries that take into account new dimesions of security, for instance, cyber security, and possible implications for Vietnam. Vietnam, as a developing country but with strong state, has been able to apply strong measures to overcome various challenges caused by Covid-19, for instance, imposing social distancing. Yet, the country still needs political will and determination to over come long-term challenges such as climate change. Thus, this study will contribute to the literarture review by identifying implications for Vietnam's security and development policies in the context of transformation of the security-development nexus.

This desk-study attempts to explore the security-development nexus in the new context of Covid-19 through the qualitative research methods such as document-based research and discourse analysis. The paper is structured in three parts, including the first one to cover the security-development nexus from theoretical perspective, which is followed by the impact of Covid-19 on the relationship between security and development, and finally the implications for Vietnam.

## THE NEXUS OF (IN)SECURITY AND (UNDER)DEVELOPMENT FROM THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

It is a common understanding that security and development have long been recognized as important for peace and stability (Kharas & Jones, 2018). However, the concepts of security and development have been extremely broad and elusive, and hence the relationships between the two are still very much confused due to complexity (Tschirgi, 2005). Security means "*stability, safety, protection and freedom from fear, threat and conflict*" (Retter, Frinking, Hoorens, Lynch, Nederveen, Phillips, 2020). It covers a wide range of areas, from economics (creation of employment and measures against poverty); food (measures against hunger and famine); health (measures against disease, unsafe food, malnutrition and lack of access to basic health care); environmental (measures against environmental degradation, resources depletion, natural disasters and pollution); personal (measures against physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence and child labor); community (measures against inter-ethnic, religious and other identity tensions); political (measures against political repression and human rights abuses) (Human Security Unit, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2009). Development is defined as '*the processes and strategies through which nations and states seek to improve human well-being in an underdeveloped country"* (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2009). Development covers from human rights to environmental sustainability, economic growth, and governance (Tschirgi, 2005). Various dimensions of security, like economics then serve development, i.e. to improve human well-being.

The security-development nexus has been largely discussed since 2004 among international organizations such as the United Nations, European Union as well as the academia. Security-development nexus is seen by the proposition that "*there can be no development without security and no security without development*" (United Nations, 2005). The relationships can be intrinsically linked, increasingly interdependent, interconnected and mutually reinforcing (SGanzle, 2009). On one hand, underdevelopment may threaten the security or breed ground for other threats, including wars. On the other hand, conflicts may lead to human and development

insecurity, resulting in vicious cycle of low development – conflict – worse development – harsher conflict (Stern & Öjendal, 2010). The conventional knowledge has mainly been built around the security and development with the traditional sense, i.e. the spending on military and weapon to maintain peace and development. The previous debates about security and development in the United Nations were mainly about peace keeping, which now have been shifting towards peace building or developmental peace keeping, especially since the end of Cold War (Neethling, 2005). Meanwhile, non-traditional security such as human security was previously assumed to have no improvement to national development or international security or vice versa (Tschirgi, 2005).

This relationship can be demonstrated in certain ways, for example: i) the development cost of insecurity which incurs reduction of economic growth, exports, rise of military expenditure, fall of social expenditure; ii) the ways in which development affects security, for instance inequality, level of development; iii) translating threats to security and growth. Security and development policies are made to recognize inequalities that may contribute to conflict, moving toward inclusive participation to increase democracy and markets and poverty reduction (Stewart, 2004). However, there's no consensus on the framework to apply security-development nexus at different levels for different policy areas (Tschirgi, 2005).

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

### COVID-19 ACCELERATES KEY DRIVING FACTORS INFLUENCING THE NEXUS OF SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Covid-19 has accelerated some key factors underlying the security-development nexus as follows:

i)  Interdependent but fractured global system
Covid-19 has revealed and accelerated the fracture of the global system. The fractures include, among others, widening persistent inequalities,

discontent with globalization, digital divides, vulnerabilities to climate change, and economic nationalism that have not been effectively dealt with. The United Nations has recognized that these fractures have been further scarred by Covid-19 (Kituyi, 2020). With Covid-19, the increasingly fractured global system has negatively impacted the achievement of sustainable development goals as well as security of the people in the world.

ii)  Rising nationalism, protectionism and geopolitical factors
In addition, due to the odd way of approach towards traditional concept of security and state-centrality, many countries fail to understand the changes of the national security. As a result, during Covid-19, many countries have focused more on national security, which leads to the border restrictions, medical stockpiling, national security framing and domestic policy. Hence, the nationalism and protectionism have been on the rise. In addition, geo-political tensions between the United States and China and the uncertainty of the United States' policy, the global power shift, have made the international system less effective. It is anticipated that these issues will cause more threats to security, as Jean-Paul Sartre wrote that "when the rich wage war, it is the poor who die" (Paul-Sartre, 1960). Hence, the entanglement of security and development issues gives rise to more complex challenges (for example biodiversity crisis, climate change) to ensure the stability and progress of sustainable economic development.

Such changing drivers have called on the need to balance the sequence between security and development. Traditionally, the security is always the first priority while development comes as the second priority, which means development is only made once the peace is maintained. The sequence during Covid-19 has been more balanced as development has been put on the equal footing with security. This is because the concept of security is transformed from purely traditional approach, i.e., emphasis on military threats, toward the consideration of non-traditional approach, i.e., health security and human security.

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AND DEVELOPMENT

The impact of Covid-19 on the relationship between security and development has first demonstrated the transformation within the security and development concepts themselves and later on the nexus between these two variables.

Covid-19 has greatly contributed to the rethinking, reset of global and national security in a number of ways. Firstly, the recognition of Covid-19 as an international and national security threat issue reflects an evolvement in definition of security that considers threats to health from peripheral to existential. A threat as existential is considered as a matter of security issue. The recognition of Covid-19 as a matter of security issue is in line with securitization theory. The securitization theory assumes that a threat requires a speech act to be existential to be named as a security issue, which means a threat needs to be designated by politicians and decision-makers as a security issue (Eroukhmanoff, 2018).

Indeed, Covid-19 has been the worst global disruptive event as a global health security threat. This assessment has been largely raised by the United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) and world leaders, as well as scholars as an international security threat (Albert, Baez, Rutland, 2021). German Interior Minister, Horst Seehofer warned Covid-19 as a matter of national security (Wang, 2021). Covid-19 has been considered a threat as existential that caused more than millions of dead with its scale and speed over the last one year to have caused 178 million cases and 3.86 million dead (by 21/6/2021). Covid-19 has affected even the leaders (former President Trump, British Prime Minister…), who control the strategic assets such nuclear weapons, or military staffs in the USS Theodore Roosevelt nuclear-powered, aircraft carrier. In that context, the Covid-19 pandemic has been considered as the greatest threat to national security, with consequences similar to a world war (npr.org, 2021). Thus, the microscopic pathogen has become a type of military instrument and the biggest enemy of the people in the world with healthcare system becoming a part of national defense system and healthcare workers are soldiers. Vaccine has become a weapon to ensure security for

the people. The recognition also continues the treatment of a disease as a security threat to international peace as declared by the United Nations for the first time since 2000 in the case of HIV/AIDS.

Secondly, the concept of national security has been re-conceptualized and more multifaceted to take into account the 'new normal' characterized by these new realities. The virus has ushered the world into uncertainty and unprecedented situation with the entanglement of geopolitics, health, economics, technology and human security (University of North Georgia, 2021). This strengthens the definition of security as complexity to include various dimensions, such as economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political as advocated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Osisanya, 2021, Hamilton, 2020).

Thirdly, while non-traditional security is normally seen as low-politics[2], Covid-19 is beyond this normal politics, as it requires mobilizing large resources at national and global level to contain and counter. Many countries have declared Covid-19 states of emergency, national state of disaster, and implemented the Disaster Management Act, such as the South African, German, Italy, and France (www.gov.za, 2020). Covid-19 has reset the national security priorities towards mobilizing resources for health services, cyber security, to ensure the safety and security of people against the virus. The budget spent for healthcare system can be considered to contribute to ensuring national security. Covid-19 has increased the awareness that with the impact of Covid-19, a country is secured only when all countries are secured (Vilasanjuan, 2021). At the global level, vaccine geopolitics has become a strategy to ensure global security (Vilasanjuan, 2021). Similarly, global public health has become the world's main security strategy and has effects on geopolitical landscape, i.e. accelerating the tension and rivalry among major powers, the U.S and China, making the so-called Cold-war 2.0 more visible. Thus, it would be more appropriate to consider Covid-19 as high politics, similar to the issues of conventional war and terrorism (Overbeke, Stadig, 2020).

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[2]  Issues such as global climate change, immigration crisis, international drug trafficking according to Baldwin, 1997.

As a consequence of the changing concept of security, in the context of Covid-19, security and development are more inextricably linked in a number of different ways.

First, the entanglement between security and development issues has increased. Emerging non-traditional security issues, for instance, health security, can be both seen as a development issue, and also a national security issue (survival issues). This means that strengthening health security also improves national security. Similarly, "economic resiliency is underpinned by national security, and national security is paid for by economic resiliency and creates the conditions for economic security" (Agnew, Beatty, 2020).

Secondly, Covid-19 has exacerbated the drivers of insecurity, and hence some certain impacts on the development and vice versa. Various scholars have debated whether Covid-19 has spurred the development or under-development, conflict or stability. The United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said "Conflict, climate change and stalled progress on development reinforce each other" (Reliefweb, 2020). Most prominently, Covid-19 has increased the process of securitization of issues such as health and environment, which have forestalled development (Deconinck, 2009).

Thirdly, development landscape has been transformed because of Covid-19 as a non-traditional security issue. Changing ways to communicate, move, work and entertain; global economic shock, sources of development have been affected, such as economic downturn, falling foreign direct investment, finance, trade but rising importance of technology. As a result, the economic development outcomes wer stolen and reversed in the first year and may repeat in the years to come. The 'Great Lockdown', as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) calls it, has created the greatest economic recession since 1930 Great Depression. Due to the economic recession, the Covid-19 has diverted resources to focus on coping with the virus, which slowed down the process of the accomplishment of sustainable development goals (SDGs). The World Bank calls the next decade as the 'lost decade' and end of the Sustainable Development Goals. Sources for development have been greatly diminished and would take time to resume to the pre-pandemic level. The short-term impacts are

reductions in agricultural production, trade restrictions, and supply chain disruptions (Drake, 2021).

Fourthly, Covid-19, as a global public health crisis, has reset the importance of public health in the national security strategy. It has ushered the world to a new era of security by exacerbating cross-border non-traditional insecurity which have impacts on the direction of development.

**Human security**: The human security is also becoming more important. Human security means "people can live to their full potential, economically fulfilled, politically enfranchised, in healthy environments, and free from the fear of violence, and pressing mortal threats such as climate change or pandemics" (Garcia, 2020). The human security is so comprehensive that covers economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security and cyber security (Altman, 2020). The term "human security 2.0" was mentioned by JICA's President Kitaoka Shinichi about the security issues in the modern era like global threats posed by violent conflict, climate change resulting from Covid-19 (Sadako, 2020).

**Social insecurity**: The Covid-19 has increased the **hyper-inequalities** among and within countries in terms of vaccine access, economic development in gender, ethnic, race, religion, disability and income: 2000 billionaires have more wealth than they could spend in a thousand lifetimes; the richest 1% have consumed twice as much carbon as the bottom 50% for the last quarter of a century. According to the UNCTAD, under the impact of the Covid-19, it is estimated that between 119 and 124 million people fall into extreme poverty in 2020, and an additional 143 to 163 million people in 2021 (UNCTAD, 2021), especially those in the informal services, construction and manufacturing, largely in South Asia (Blake, Wadhwa 2020). UNICEF (2020) also reported about a third of schoolchildren in Asia and in the world could not access remote learning UNICEF (2020). Similarly UNCTAD has recognized that the pandemic has hit the most vulnerable the hardest (UNCTAD, 2020).

One of the reasons for increasing hyper-inequality is due to the weaknesses of social protection. Covid-19 has a dark cost to the weak social protection systems. More than half of the world's population were not covered by social insurance or assistance when the pandemic hit; educa-

tion divided in more than 180 countries temporarily closed their schools, with children in the poorest countries deprived of almost 4 months of schooling as compared to 1.5 months for children in high income; job loss due to the lack of training for people, especially the adult. Another reason is due to the contracted world economy. Other obstacles would be debt sustainability, government intervention in economic affairs (UNCTAD, 2020).

**Food security**: "Food security refers to an individual's ability to daily consume preferred, safe, and nutritious food that enhances life" (Drake, 2021). Because of disruptive transportation and production due to lock down and social distancing, the Covid-19 has amplified the severity of global food security, which caused the situation that the World Bank called "a crisis-within-a crisis" (World Bank, 2021). According to the World Food Programme (WFP), as of April 2021, it is estimated that "296 million people in the 35 countries are without sufficient food, 111 million more people than in April 2020" (World Bank, 2021). This adds up to the existing 2 billion people suffering from food insecurity (United Nations, 2020). Thus, although there's no global food insecurity, food insecurity has been scaled up and food accessibility has been compromised for others. Thus, the severity of food insecurity threatens the ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Cyber security and digital transformation**: While Covid-19 has accelerated the process of digital transformation, it also reveals many loopholes in the security systems, especially cyber security, increasing the risks of cyber security as many countries are not ready for such transformation (Seloom, 2020). As cyber security has existed for years before the Covid-19, the Covid-19 crisis has shifted target of cyber security not limited from individuals and small businesses but also to all other subjects such as "major corporations, governments and critical infrastructure, according to Interpol" (Financier Worldwide Magazine, 2021). The possible risks are, for instance disinformation, cyber sabotage, espionage, war. According to various reports, malicious emails have increased 600 per cent during the pandemic; ransom ware attacks in healthcare jumped 580 per cent; mobile phishing increased more than 300 per cent; cybercrime cost the world over 1 trillion in 2020, equivalent to 1% of global GDP (Atlas VPN report),

increasing more than 50 per cent compared to 2018 ($600 billion) (Ballard, 2021).

**Environmental security**: While the food crisis is short-term impact, the climate change is a long-term threat that may cause long-lasting impact on the world. During the Covid-19, people have changed their lives towards more sustainable habits and practices. The lockdown, travel, avoiding waste has been formed, beneficial to the sustainable development. According to research by Marshall Burke at Stanford University, in China, two months of reduced pollution has saved the lives of 4000 children under the age of 5 and 73000 adults over the age of 70 (Jason, 2020).

Fifthly, handling of security and development is directed towards a more integrated and balanced manner as reflected by new development trends that incorporate security issues. The Covid-19 has enlarged the development agenda toward more emphasis on coping with both short-term and long-term impacts of non-traditional security issues, i.e. the pandemic in the first place, and then climate change. Many international organizations and governments have promoted **green recovery model**, **resilient, inclusive and sustainable development**. The structural changes, for instance resilient, green (climate-resilient) infrastructure investments, towards more balanced growth is encouraged by many international organizations such as Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Mehta, Anouj, and Naeeda. 2020). This balanced approach prevails over the traditional sequence of giving prominence of security before development. Dealing with the Covid-19, the leaders have realized the importance of managing the pandemic while maintaining the scope of development through economic recovery. At the global level, the United Nations has mapped out a nexus approach to handle the humanitarian and development challenges at the same time, i.e. the UN's New Way of Working, resulting in collective outcomes of humanitarian and development actors that reduce need, risk and vulnerability in coming years (United Nations, 2021).

Another development trend promoted to cope with rising securities in the context of Covid-19 is digital transformation. Given new lifestyle characterized by social distancing caused by Covid-19, digital transformation has contributed to mitigating the negative impacts of Covid-19 on economic activities as well as health protection by technology. Digital

technologies like artificial intelligence, robotic process automation, have helped government, companies to deliver goods and services at a smarter, faster and safer manner, increasing the competitiveness. However, the implicit impacts such as digital divides lack of regulations for digital transaction, cross-border data transfer may cause problems to the national security. To handle this situation, it is necessary to up skill, reskill workers to avoid loss of jobs. The world also needs joint efforts to make global digital rules and standards.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM'S SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The transformation of the relationship between security and development during the Covid-19 time has created both opportunities and challenges, requiring Vietnam's to adjust toward integrated security and development. Since 2020, Vietnam's leadership has fully aware of importance of fighting against Covid-19 that has been considered as fighting a war. This means Covid-19 is seen as one of top security issues, similar to a foreign invasion. The 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 2021 has recently recognized the importance of the human security for the country as reported in the most important document (the political report) of the Communist Party of Vietnam. In the direction for national development in the period of 2021–2030, the XIII National Congress directed to "*effective management of social development, ensure social security, human security; implementing social progress and equality*", "*upholding political security, social order and safety, economic security, cyber security, human security, building social order and disciplines*".

Even though, Vietnam has previously implemented necessary measures to protect human lives. During the initial phase of the Covid-19, the leadership was determined to protect lives of the people, even at the cost of economic development, reflecting the human-centric focus in the leadership's mindset. The former Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc in the cabinet meeting as early as February 2020 identified the direction and willingness to sacrifice some economic benefits to ensure best ways for

protection of people, tourists and foreigners' health in Vietnam (Hcmcpv. org, 2020). Subsequently, fighting Covid-19 requires the collective efforts of the whole political system, the Communist Party of Vietnam, and military to enter the war during peacetime. The military and police forces have been mobilized not only to keep the security across the border, but also to assist doctors to trace the F0, F1, F2, and establish quarantine bases. As a result, Vietnam has so far successfully controlled Covid-19, and was among few countries to maintain positive GDP growth rate in 2020, and hence built positive image of in terms of achievement of the SDGs.

Besides, Vietnam has strongly supported the global and regional cooperation to reset the agenda to focus on fighting the Covid-19, and quick recovery, inclusive, and sustainable development. The government has set path for development to focus on some key directions that are in line with the world's trends. For instance, the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) has set the target of 100 per cent of enterprises to receive digital transformation training for the period of 2021–25 (Vietnamnews, 2021)

Thus, the key for Vietnam's success remains with the strong political leadership of the communist party to control Covid-19 and post-pandemic economic recovery. Due to the intersection of national security, health, economic, technology security with development, the post-pandemic policy to harmonize the security and development should be revised for a whole-government approach towards sustainable, resilient, green and inclusive sustainable development. At the national level, the security-development nexus will require government to play a more active role during this crisis. Measures to handle the difficulties in terms of security-development nexus are, among others, stronger social protection programs, resolving non-performing loans, promoting domestic tourism, travel bubbles. Further directions that Vietnam should focus on to ensure the economic resilience and sustainable development in the coming time:

Firstly, the country should ensure that Covid-19 is well controlled, avoiding the situation that the Covid-19 turns into crisis, leading to food insecurity, human insecurity, economic insecurity. This will require the determination to limit Covid-19 transmission and implement the Covid-19 vaccination strategy. Secondly, it is necessary to take advantages of

emerging development trends such as globalization, shifting of supply chain, digital economy, sea economy, and industrial revolution 4.0.

Thirdly, Vietnam can build its own sustainable, green, resilient recovery framework with various tools that can meet both security and development purposes in the national social-economic development policy. The policies such as green supply policies, carbon pricing, green investment to adapt with climate change, climate-adapted infrastructure, and green finance would help reduce $CO_2$ emissions and boost real GDP. At the global level, Vietnam may consider joining the global green new deal framework to revive the multilateralism, proposed by the UNDP that covers: i) Jobs and wages; ii) Strong and sustained public spending; iii) Progressive tax measures; iv) Diversification.

Fourthly, socially, it is necessary to improve social security in the development agenda. This means that strengthening the social protection net, protection of the most vulnerable, reducing inequality in education and learning, improving the participation, will influence and raise voice of the people, towards leaving no one behind. In the field of education, human resources development should focus on upskills, reskills and lifelong learning. In the areas of security, the new thinking of placing human security, as the epicenter of national development strategies should be further promoted. Protection of human security should continue to be the motivation for ensuring the societal order and political stability, and building and developing the country towards prosperity.

Fifthly, national security should be improved in economic terms, for instance protection of data, technology transfer, review of investments to ensure security objectives, especially in those industries and technologies critical to national security; create an enabling and favorable environment for the development of private sector, especially the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to mobilize domestic resource; ensure supply chain for essential goods and services. In terms of digital development, the government can enhance digital skills and knowledge by digital upskill and reskill, and at the same time encourage innovative capacity.

# CONCLUSION

The security-development nexus has been largely discussed and left open for further exploration due to its unclear and vague content. Covid-19 has been a game-changer that has contributed greatly to the discourse about the transformation of the relationship between security and development. The paper has revealed that Covid-19 has demonstrated the increased the intertwine and interconnection between the security and development. Covid-19 itself has evolved from health security to a national and global security threat that directly impacts on the survival and development of human kind. Hence, the non-traditional security in general, and health security has been seen as the greatest threat so far to the global security.

To deal with such unprecedented threat, decision makers should rank non-traditional security high on agenda, not simply a low politics issue, which requires the global and national cooperation, even with the involvement of military, as demonstrated in the case of Vietnam. The country has successfully mobilized the whole political system, utilized national resources, and raised the awareness and support of the people during the combat against the Covid-19. These lessons learnt during the Covid-19 should be applied in the future to cope with other challenges such as climate change. The leadership should take urgent action to integrate the climate change issues on top of the agenda of the country's socio-economic development strategy and policy. The study and its recommendations are preliminary ones, due to the absent of studies on various issues such as impacts of Covid-19 on specific security or development policies in different countries, or studies on specific security or development issues and the relationships thereof. These areas should be further explored for better understanding of the fast-changing nexus of security and development in the post-Covid-19.

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