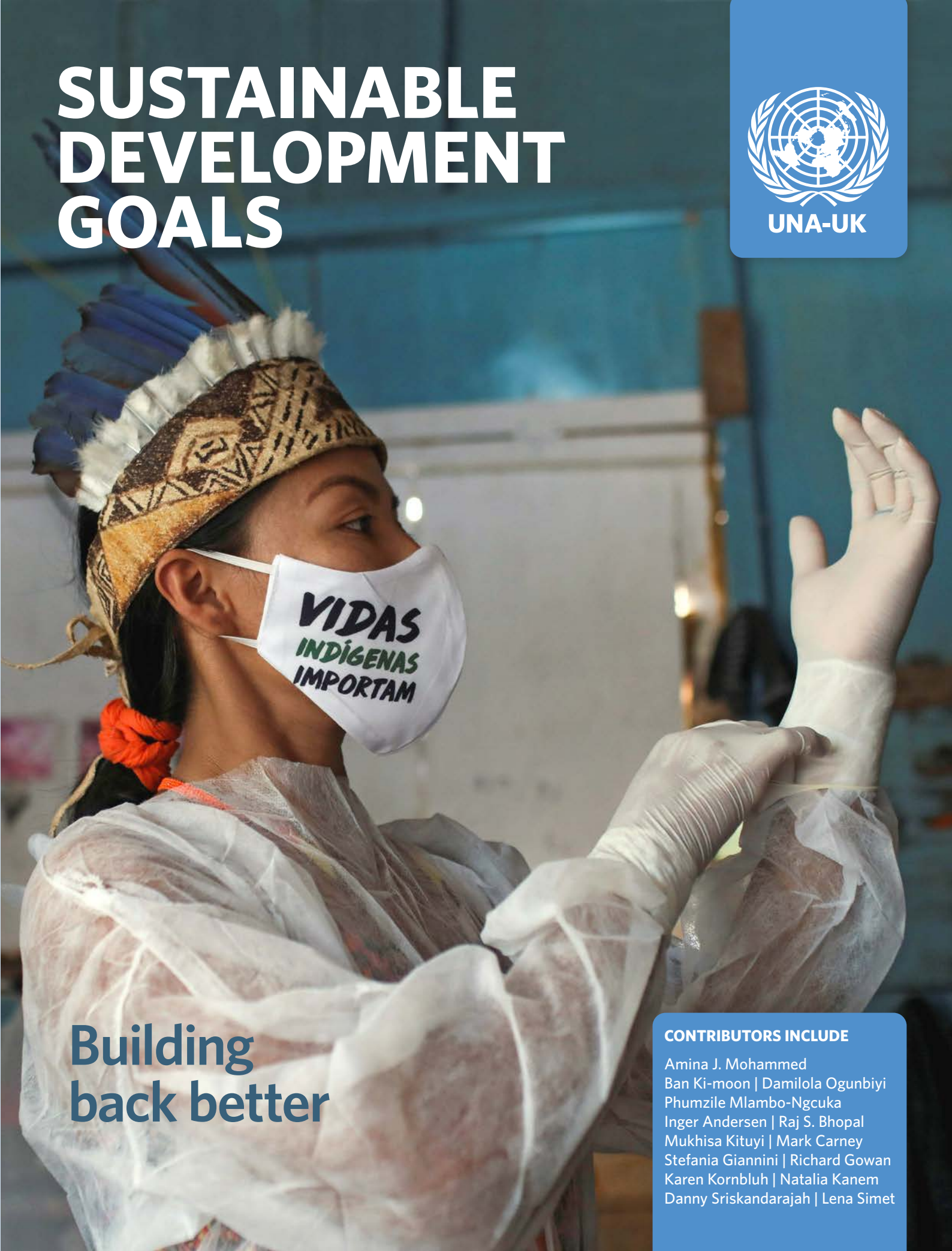


SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



**Building
back better**

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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End poverty in all its forms everywhere

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2 ZERO HUNGER

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

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Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

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4 QUALITY EDUCATION



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

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The Decade of Action

Recovering better after COVID-19 demands that we redouble our ambition, decisiveness and urgency to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



By **Amina J. Mohammed**, Deputy Secretary-General to the United Nations

In September 2019, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to accelerate efforts to deliver on the ambitious, universal and inclusive 2030 Agenda.

The United Nations Secretary-General has called on all sectors of society to mobilise for the Decade of Action on three levels:

- **Global action:** to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the SDGs.
- **Local action:** to embed the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities.
- **People action:** to mobilise youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders to generate an unstoppable movement for the required transformations.

But, right at the start of the Decade of Action, the COVID-19 pandemic knocked us off-kilter, taking hundreds of thousands of lives, and affecting the livelihoods of billions. Hard-earned progress on poverty eradication, vaccinations, education and gender equality risks being halted or reversed. Systemic vulnerabilities and pre-existing inequalities are exacerbated and more acutely felt than ever, particularly by the most marginalised.

SDG implementation was already off track before the pandemic. Many argue that the road ahead could be even more challenging, with the world potentially facing even higher levels of poverty, unemployment and gender inequality, massive gaps in financing, as well as a rapidly worsening climate emergency.

New normal

But, if we take a closer look, we will see how the pandemic has taught us a few things too.

◀ Amina J. Mohammed and the UN delegation join the 'Walk for Life' to celebrate International Women's Day during their visit to Papua New Guinea. The delegation was in the country to discuss gender equality, youth engagement, sorcery-related violence, climate change and conflict resolution and peacebuilding

We are seeing more clearly how the systems on which we depend – for food, trade, health and climate – are interdependent. We are seeing more clearly the benefits of universal health coverage, social protection, and universal access to basic services like energy, water and sanitation, quality education, and the internet. We are seeing more clearly the consequences of inequalities that expose billions of people to the risk of poverty and financial collapse during periods of economic shock. We have been forced out of our comfort zones, made to embrace a new normal that we didn't know was possible before, and which has much less environmental impact. These hard-learned lessons will help us recover better and put us on a path towards accelerated sustainable development.

Going forward, the SDGs remain our North Star, guiding us to address the most pressing global and local challenges across environmental, social and economic dimensions. The SDGs are our common plan to reverse the damage we have been inflicting on our natural environment. The SDGs are a call for unity, for international cooperation, for partnerships and solidarity. They will guide us to rebuild a more resilient, sustainable, equitable and inclusive future.

There are still many achievements on which we can build, despite the setbacks from the pandemic. In the past five years, we have seen an unprecedented mobilisation towards the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. We have seen this in the hundreds of voluntary reports from national governments presented to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. We have seen stakeholders – from civil society to community organisations, from multinational companies to small and medium-sized enterprises, from local and regional governments to universities, from schools to individuals, especially young people – embrace the SDGs.

We have also seen how the entire UN system, in particular through a new Resident Coordinator system, has been reformed to ensure we are providing the best possible support to Member States in their efforts towards the 2030 Agenda.

Delivering the SDGs in the next decade will demand ambition, decisiveness and a sense of urgency. This should be translated into increased investments in public services, including social protection, health systems, education, water, sanitation and digital connectivity. It will entail pursuing a recovery that builds an inclusive, green and gender-responsive economy while reshaping the way we work, learn, live and consume. It will mean listening to the world's youth, who are demanding justice, equality and sustainability. It will require solidarity and foresight on financing.

Effective multilateralism

The year 2020 also marks the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. Today's challenges demand us to reimagine multilateralism and ensure that effective global governance is a reality when it is needed.

Now is the time to create an inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism, one based on the powerful ideals and objectives enshrined in the Charter and in the agreements defined across the decades since. It must be a multilateralism built on trust, based on international law and geared towards the overarching goals of peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.

The Decade of Action for the SDGs will demand the mobilisation of everyone everywhere, grounded on a level of ambition that supercharges ideas into concrete, bold and implementable solutions. We need to share experiences, and to understand what works and what can be replicated or taken to greater scale. We need to renew our determination to enact a multilateral response that gears recovery efforts through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Furthermore, we need to drive sustainable innovation, financial investments and technology – while making space in our communities and cities for young people to lead.

I commend the UNA-UK for the seventh edition of *Sustainable Development Goals*. I hope this publication inspires and energises all of us to press ahead and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Decade of Action. ●

Showing the way

In the aftermath of COVID-19 what was once radical now seems like common sense. But in the absence of global consensus how can this new understanding translate into the “Decade of Action” we need?

By **Fred Carver**, Adviser,
United Nations Association – UK

A little over 75 years ago, World War II, a crisis unlike any that had come before, had not yet ended but it was clear that it would end. “Determined to save succeeding generations” from a third world war, governments – with the major powers in the lead, but a surprising number of “we the peoples” in the room – forged the United Nations and the global system that defines our world to this day.

We are currently living through a crisis unlike any we have seen since then. While the death toll is, thankfully, not as high as the Great Chinese Famine, the Second Congo War, or the Sahel drought, the global scale of the pandemic (only a handful of Pacific islands and North Korea have thus far reported no cases) and its implications for nearly every aspect of the way almost every community lives its lives make it an unmatched global moment. It is far from over, but, just as 75 years ago, we must prepare for what comes in its wake.

As with World War II, devastation on this global scale cannot be allowed to happen again. And just as World War II revealed fundamental flaws within our global system – notably empire – that could not survive into the second half of the 20th century, so too the COVID-19 crisis is revealing fundamental truths about our current way of life – iniquities and limitations we cannot take into the mid-21st century. Hence the call to ‘build back better’ – a phrase first popularised in the United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015, and now ubiquitous.

Yet while it is clear that the way things were is dying, what will come next has still

not yet emerged. The challenge for our world leaders is to proceed as rapidly as possible through the unhealthy interregnum humanity now finds itself in.

Unfortunately, while World War II created a moment of political unity through which the world could be reshaped, COVID-19 has thus far only exacerbated division. Squabbling between major powers meant that it was over three months before the UN Security Council could even discuss the pandemic. The adoption of a political declaration by Member States on the occasion of the UN’s 75th anniversary was likewise delayed by power games over wording, with the ultimate consequence that phrasing related to climate change

The COVID-19 crisis is revealing fundamental truths about our current way of life – iniquities and limitations we cannot take into the mid-21st century

was watered down. While the eventual text did contain a compelling analysis of the problems our world faces and a renewed political commitment to global cooperation in response, it wisely delegated the task of articulating a vision for the world’s future to the UN Secretary-General. He will now report back by September 2021 with recommendations.

If recent speeches, notably on Nelson Mandela Day, are any indication, the Secretary-General has a fairly clear idea of

what the content of that vision will be. A green new deal, with its commitment to a just transition to a carbon neutral economy, and a new social contract at the heart of which is a commitment to leave no one behind; to tackle inequality and ensure that the global system delivers for those that currently feel alienated from it.

Once upon a time, that agenda, and its corollaries (that the long-term general health of a society is more important than the short-term accumulation of value – of growth for its own sake, that we are all interconnected and interdependent, and that the well-being of all is therefore dependent upon the well-being of the most precarious) would have been radical. Now it feels like common sense: the only possible means of dispersing the miasmas, be they pathogens or greenhouse gases, that shroud our planet. It is also the only possible means of delivering the UN’s promised ‘Decade of Action’ to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

But if this quiet revolution in thinking has brought a new and broadly hegemonic understanding of the ‘what’ that is required, one that is codified in the goals, there is less clarity on the ‘how’.

It is here that I believe this publication can make its most useful contribution. Inside is a veritable toolkit for those wishing to build back better. We have policy analyses on what that means for all 17 of the SDGs (see page 7 for a guide) and how they interconnect (page 42) as well as think pieces on the future of aid (page 103), work (page 77), the city (page 39), transport (page 116), and the economy (page 80). We also consider how the impacts will be disproportionately felt by the elderly (page 32), women (page 86), and marginalised



▲ Sana'a, Yemen, a volunteer demonstrates how to wash hands to protect against the coronavirus

communities (page 12) – particularly the Black Lives (page 89) that so often only seem to Matter when activists force policy makers to recognise that they must.

A broad array of practitioners should find this useful, because as Goal 17 makes clear, the SDGs can only be delivered through a whole-of-society endeavour. The SDGs represent an agenda for the world, not just for the United Nations.

Indeed, the actual agency of the United Nations is fairly limited. There's a possibly apocryphal quote which has been attributed to various Governors of the Bank of England (not Mark Carney, whose thoughtful essay on the credit crisis appears on page 18) that compares that role to being notionally the driver of a car when in reality the only thing you have a hold on is the handbrake; all the other controls being in the hands of different members of a gaggle of querulous, uncommunicative and highly strung boy racers. If that analogy holds for the British economy, it is even more true for the role of the UN Secretary-General in steering the

course of our global agenda, although the controls in his hands are more akin to the turning signals. Too often he can do little more than indicate furiously as the political forces that drive our society once again miss the correct turn-off to a better world.

But if such thoughts create grounds for pessimism, we can find optimism in the willingness of so many – as demonstrated by the UN's global survey (page 54) – to effect change, and in the lessons history teaches. Because the fact that many of the correct turns were taken in 1945 was in a large part due to the passengers of our global vehicle – representatives of civil society, representatives of the Global South, a small but influential number of women – who made themselves heard and imparted a sense of direction upon the political forces of the day.

The political settlement of 1945 certainly had a large amount of institutional privilege wired into it from its inception – notably the veto power of the five victors of World War II over any coercive action – but it also gave an unprecedented platform to those

previously excluded from the corridors of power. A similar step-change in who is listened to is required now: to provide developing states with the same amplification as the developed, civil society the same platform as states, and the unorganised and the marginalised the same opportunities as those who are represented by established institutions. It's time to listen to the backseat drivers – they have the map.

The UN's Agenda 2030 gives us 10 more years to create a sustainable world which not only remedies the flaws in our current society but is resilient enough to survive the challenges that will come in the mid-21st century; chief among them is the changing climate – a crisis the scale of which will dwarf COVID-19 and everything that came before it. The goals show us what needs to be done, and I hope this publication can provide insight as to how. Now our Decade of Action must begin. ●



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Fault lines laid bare

Far from being the 'great equaliser', COVID-19 has exposed deep structural inequalities, with profound human rights implications. What lessons can the international community take forward to tackle the injustices in our societies?



◀ Activists raise a statue to 'Elena the Essential Worker' at a demonstration in Times Square, New York, to demand a 'fair wage' for tipped workers during the pandemic

and social effects. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is warning of a worse impact than the 2008–09 global financial crisis. The broader consequences of coronavirus are already visible, with a staggering number of people pushed deeper into poverty, facing acute food insecurity and losing their homes due to forced evictions.

Before the pandemic, more than 700 million people, or 10 per cent of the world's population, lived in extreme poverty on less than \$1.90 a day, with resources far too low to enjoy their right to an adequate standard of living. Projections by the UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research estimate that 80 million more people could experience extreme poverty in the best scenario of how COVID-19 plays out. In the worst, as many as 420 million people could slip into extreme poverty. The United Nations has warned of a 9.1 per cent increase in poverty among women and a widening of the existing poverty gap between women and men.

At the same time, Oxfam has found that between March and July, eight new billionaires emerged in Latin America alone, and the overall wealth of billionaires there grew by 17 per cent. That's equivalent to a third of all stimulus packages in the region, or nine times the urgent loans provided by the IMF.

The pandemic's economic fallout has resulted in income loss primarily affecting people living in or vulnerable to poverty, working in jobs that are more exposed to layoffs and pay cuts, and, in general, working in precarious employment. Workers in the informal economy were hit especially hard since most of those jobs are low paid and cannot be performed remotely.

The pandemic's unequal health impacts were perhaps most visible in urban areas. New York City reported that COVID-19-related deaths were three times as high in the most deprived areas as in the least deprived. A survey by the Mumbai municipality and research institutes found that over

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By **Lena Simet**, Senior Researcher and Advocate, Poverty and Inequality, Human Rights Watch

What started as a health crisis has quickly turned into an economic and human rights crisis, with hundreds of thousands of lives lost, over one billion children out of school, and jobs that have disappeared overnight. The people suffering the most from the COVID-19 pandemic are those already marginalised due to race, gender and economic circumstances.

Apart from the immediate tragedy, the pandemic will have long-lasting economic

half of Mumbai's seven million slum-dwellers already had COVID-19. And in Buenos Aires' largest slum, Villa 31, where overcrowding is high and many households lack water inside their homes, infections have soared despite drastic lockdown measures.

The opposing realities of rich and poor speak to the rise in economic inequality in most countries over the last decades. They also suggest a reversal of any prospect of achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Major setbacks are anticipated on the SDGs most directly related to inequality, including SDG 1 (end poverty), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 10 (reduce inequalities both within and between countries). But even before the pandemic, the SDG process was ill-equipped to reduce inequalities. The targets, indicators and systems for reaching SDG 10 were weak from the start, framing the inequality agenda as one of 'shared prosperity' focused on inclusive growth rather than actual reduction of inequalities.

Deepening disparities

Treating the reduction of inequality as just one in a long list of goals is problematic because extreme inequality is a barrier to achieving the 2030 Agenda as a whole. The rise in inequality had detrimental human rights effects, making it harder to reduce poverty and promoting disparities in access to health, education, housing and other services essential to economic and social rights, including along racial and gender lines. COVID-19 is deepening these disparities, especially for women and girls, in every sphere, including disproportionately driving them out of education, employment and housing.

The policy measures introduced to prevent some of the pandemic's worst effects have also benefited people differently, depending on socio-economic class, gender, age, ethnicity or race and territory, and other factors such as disability or migratory status. At Human Rights Watch, we have been following the disproportionate financial impact of COVID-19 and economic relief packages in about a dozen countries. We found that governments had often taken

essential steps, but have not been sufficiently sensitive to inequality or adequately focused on protecting people's rights and preventing them from falling into poverty.

The pandemic offers a chance to change the status quo, though, and to move towards an economy that uplifts, rather than imperils, human rights. To seize this chance, countries should do at least three things.

1. Avoid austerity measures that violate rights

The spread of COVID-19 has laid bare the catastrophic consequences of austerity-driven fiscal policy that affects basic rights, which has been pursued aggressively since the global financial crisis. The austerity measures led to dilapidated public services, as governments cut spending and hollowed out programmes crucial to guaranteeing human rights. Public health systems in particular

have been left strapped for resources necessary to tackle the pandemic. As countries enter the pandemic recovery phase and face large fiscal deficits, they should guarantee basic economic rights for all, consider progressive taxation, and strengthen public institutions rather than pursuing austerity measures.

2. Expand social protection systems

Most countries have weak and patchy social protection systems, with many people falling through the cracks. Although social security is a universal human right, the International Labour Organization estimates that before the pandemic, 55 per cent of the global population lacked access to social protection. Unemployment benefits covered only one in five unemployed workers worldwide.

Countries need to establish social protection floors, providing income support and other measures to ensure an adequate standard of living. Labour markets should

be regulated to protect against exploitative practices. Both informal and formal workers need support to get decent jobs that pay a living wage and allow them to organise and balance their work-family responsibilities. This is particularly important when other basic services like education are closed, to ensure that women do not suffer the brunt of lost jobs.

3. Institutionalise action and oversight for reducing inequality

In 2015, 193 government leaders committed to reduce inequality as part of the 2030 Agenda. Progressive taxation and social programmes with a robust component to redistribute wealth are part of this commitment (see target 10.4: adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality). However, most countries seem to

The pandemic offers a chance to change the status quo and to move towards an economy that uplifts, rather than imperils, human rights

have stopped short of taking action. Tackling inequality during the recovery and beyond will require institutions and forums designed for accountability that monitor progress and compel change.

The pandemic's course provides a painful reminder of the vast inequalities entrenched in our societies and economic systems. Continued poverty and extreme inequality are incompatible with the human right to an adequate standard of living. The failure to take the necessary steps to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality are policy choices that must be reversed to right the wrongs that have persisted for too long.

Governments should design their recovery efforts with a human rights lens that recognises that economic inequality and rights are intrinsically linked. This is essential if we are to build back better and hold governments and international institutions accountable for the kind of recovery they pursue. ●



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Funding health

COVID-19 has threatened to overwhelm health systems worldwide. What lessons can we learn about how to achieve 'good health and well-being for all'?

By **Andrea Thoumi**, Research Director, Global Health, Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy

At the dawn of the new decade, the world's focus has coalesced around containing the social, economic and health effects of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Mitigation strategies

reflect that the pandemic is not just a public health crisis, but an all-sector crisis. Strategies include countercyclical economic stimulus measures, cash transfers and food distribution, and new health investments. Yet, the consequences of COVID-19 are affecting all human development sectors that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to improve.

The pandemic has worsened the health-poverty trap and exposed existing health inequities. National lockdowns and partial

▲ A nurse makes a home visit in Central Java province, Indonesia. Indonesia introduced its national health insurance scheme in 2014. It now provides coverage for 221 million of the country's total 271 million population – the goal is universal coverage

social distancing measures intended to stem the spread of disease have created economic shocks that will leave lasting human development effects in emerging markets.

The World Bank projects a global GDP contraction of 5 per cent and an increase in poverty by 2.3 per cent in 2020, or the equivalent of 350 million additional people living below the \$5.50 a day poverty line. Globally, we have also witnessed drastic health sector disruptions in essential services like rehabilitation, vaccinations, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis control, and maternal and child health. All of these services are core priorities to achieving SDG 3 (good health and well-being).

Countries' abilities to cope with the pandemic have varied widely. Some have succeeded in controlling the spread of the virus, while others have experienced health system collapse. Many social, economic and health factors can explain this variation. These include social inequity, economic informality, political leadership and health system capacity to respond to the pandemic.

The level of health investment and the question of how health is paid for, pooled and purchased, can influence the degree to which outcomes worsen health inequity. Although mixed, the evidence suggests three key health-financing trends will need to be addressed in the post-COVID health agenda: degree of privatisation, system fragmentation and flexible resource allocation.

Differences in coping and unintended outcomes

Countries with greater healthcare privatisation are worse off than countries with greater public health spending. Countries with higher health investment are coping better than countries with lower health investment. One study found that private health expenditure was positively correlated with COVID-19 cases and deaths, while an increase in hospital beds was negatively correlated with COVID-19 deaths.

These results are unsurprising. While the private sector can improve health coverage and access, an over-reliance on private health spending, including out-of-pocket

payments, can widen health inequities and increase household vulnerability to health-related financial shocks. We also know increased health investments in health system capacity lead to improved health outcomes, especially for key SDG targets like reductions in infant mortality.

Greater fragmentation of risk pools may offer an explanation, but the emerging evidence during the pandemic is mixed. Latin America is a region known for fragmented health systems despite reforms to increase insurance coverage through universal health coverage (UHC) to leave no one behind, a key pillar of the 2030 Agenda. As of October 2020, the region is a global hotspot of the pandemic, and contains five of the 10 countries with the highest number of confirmed cases of COVID-19. Fragmentation also hindered the Italian response. Yet, even the highest-

to mitigate the risk of worsening health inequities.

The future agenda for health financing

The post-COVID health agenda for health financing will need to broaden beyond healthcare and take an all-sector view of health. Through prior work, colleagues and I noted the intersectionality of health and offered a roadmap for using the SDG 3 priorities to inform the global response to COVID-19. Building on those opportunities, below are three health financing strategies to strengthen health systems and make them more equitable to all populations.

1. Shift from labour tax to general taxation for raising revenue for health

The pandemic has heightened awareness of the perils of linking revenue generation to

Flexible measures such as strategic purchasing can help direct resources where they're most needed. Emerging success during the pandemic aligns with evidence that strategic purchasing is a key policy tool for achieving universal health coverage

performing and resilient health systems with lower fragmentation remain vulnerable to COVID-19 resurgence.

Flexible measures such as strategic purchasing can help direct resources where they're most needed. Emerging success during the pandemic aligns with evidence that strategic purchasing is a key policy tool for achieving UHC. Countries like South Korea, Argentina and Ghana have adopted flexible models to build new infrastructure, create bonus payments for health workers treating patients with COVID-19, or redesign primary care through partnerships with the private sector.

The debate about the role of the private sector in health and the effect on equity is not new. The South Korean experience shows that public-private partnerships are possible, but require good governance and the right regulatory environment

formal employment, especially in countries with high rates of economic and labour informality that make it difficult to collect taxes.

Calls for general taxation for health financing are not new, with research by the World Bank, World Health Organization and other leading experts spotlighting the negative effect of labour tax revenue generation on health equity. Compared to general taxation, labour tax systems lead to regressive distribution of health financing that deepens social inequities. While fiscal constraints and the global recession will make it harder to generate revenues, there are many policy levers that policy makers can implement to generate resources for health through general taxation.

2. Reduce health system fragmentation

UHC is a cornerstone of health system

resilience and health equity. While many insurance pooling arrangements exist to achieve this SDG, pursuing coverage through fragmented pooling mechanisms can create downstream effects that worsen inequities and reflect entrenched economic class divisions. People are placed in different risk pools based on formal employment, which creates different health systems for different populations based on socio-economic status. The result of fragmentation is different access to health systems that vary on quality, patient satisfaction and health outcomes.

3. Accelerate efforts to advance strategic purchasing arrangements

Closing the health financing gap to meet SDG 3 will require increased prioritisation and investment from all levels of global health leadership. Many global leaders and organisations have already called for increased investments to fund community health and primary healthcare, which are key delivery channels to achieve UHC.

Coupled with much-needed increased investments, we also need a new way of purchasing health services. Growing experience with strategic purchasing or value-based payment before and during the pandemic shows that these purchasing arrangements provide increased flexibility for allocation of resources and can encourage health innovation to fill health system gaps.

Reigniting the SDGs

The SDGs are an established global framework for all sectors of human, social and economic development that can guide leaders as they respond during times of crises and prepare health systems for the future. This means advancing the three evidence-based health financing strategies outlined above.

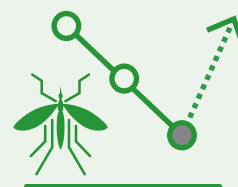
But these strategies cannot be implemented in isolation. Current and future policy responses will need to span health, social and economic sectors. In sum, leaders need to reignite the SDGs as countries continue to fight the pandemic while simultaneously preparing health systems for the future. The time to act is now. ●

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

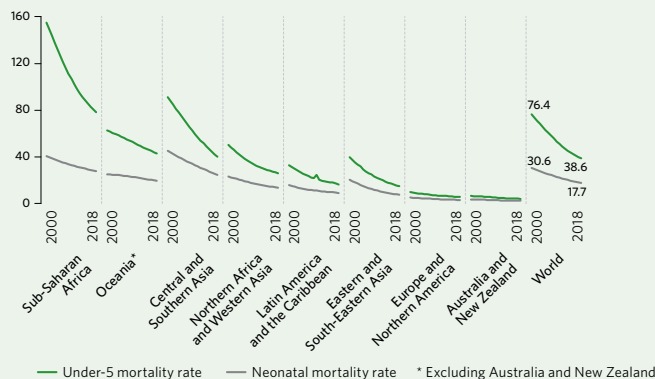
The pandemic has interrupted childhood immunisation programmes in around 70 countries



Illness and deaths from communicable diseases will spike. Service cancellations will lead to **100%** increase in malaria deaths in sub-Saharan Africa.

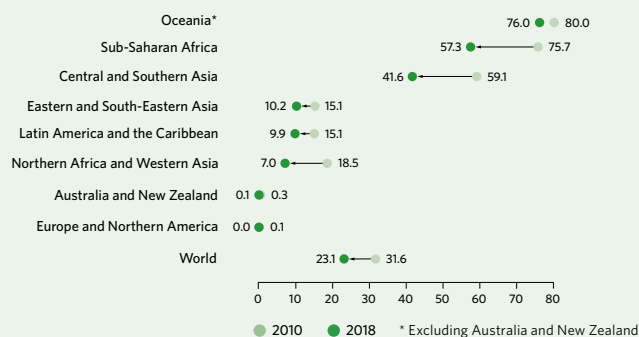
Under-5 and neonatal mortality rates, 2000-2018 (deaths per 1,000 live births)

By 2018, 121 countries had already met the SDG target on under-5 mortality, and 21 countries are expected to do so by 2030. However, progress will need to accelerate in 53 countries, two thirds of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.



Proportion of people requiring interventions against neglected tropical diseases out of the total population, 2010 and 2018 (percentage)

Progress in neglected tropical disease control, elimination and eradication was notable over the past decade.



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020



© Henning Bagger/Ritzau Scanpix/AFP via Getty Images

New risks, new resilience

2020 has highlighted the value of resilience and the importance of preparing adequately for risks. What can we learn from previous crises to prepare us for climate change?

By **Mark Carney**, UN Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance, Adviser to the UK Prime Minister for COP 26 Finance and former Governor of the Bank of England

To build a better future, we must learn from our current predicament. The coronavirus tragedy proves we cannot wish away systemic risks, and that we need

to invest upfront to avoid disaster down the road. As with COVID-19, climate change involves the entire world. Yet it is a threat from which no one will be able to self-isolate and is predicted by science to be tomorrow's biggest risk.

The searing experience of the simultaneous health and economic crises of COVID-19 will change how governments

and companies balance risk and resilience. We are entering a world in which they will be expected to prepare for the unexpected. The financial sector learned these lessons the hard way during the global financial crisis, which is why banks have been strong enough to be part of the solution today. The question now is which companies will operate with minimal liquidity, stretched supply chains

◀ North Sea gas processing platforms being scrapped and recycled at the port of Frederikshavn, Denmark. If we are to keep emissions to a level consistent with global warming below 2°C, half of the world's gas reserves must be considered un-burnable

and contingency plans? Which governments will rely on global markets to address local crises?

Let me reflect on a few common features of crises past and present to suggest some remedies to prevent the climate crisis of the future.

Crises compel us to improve transparency and reporting

What gets measured, gets managed. A common feature of financial crises is a lack of transparency, and in response a push to improve reporting. Following the 1929 Wall Street Crash and subsequent Great Depression came the creation of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). The SEC introduced the first common disclosure standard – GAAP (generally accepted accounting principles) accounting – so that investors could receive “truthful and uniform” financial data about public securities.

Before the more recent global financial crisis, the combination of securitisation and shadow banking was lauded for apparently increasing returns and reducing risks. However, this system had only spread risk, contingently and opaquely, in ways that ended up magnifying it, as it collapsed back onto bank balance sheets. Reforms to securitisation rules and accounting standards now ensure that if a bank has an ongoing relationship with a transaction, the risk stays on its balance sheet.

In the pandemic, measurement has meant testing, tracing and reporting becoming key components to contain the virus. It has also meant being transparent about the economic trade-offs of a strategy to prioritise health now and deal with the economic consequences later.

Improving measurement of climate-related financial risks

As the climate crisis crystallises we will not get a second chance to put in place the right

reporting framework. As James Gorman, CEO of Morgan Stanley, remarked in Congressional testimony about whether climate change was a risk to financial stability: “It’s hard to have a financial system if you don’t have a planet.”

In this spirit, we must act in advance to ensure stakeholders know the climate-related financial risks that companies are facing and how they are managing them.

The Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), a private-sector-led initiative for developing recommendations for climate-related financial reporting, has become the go-to standard for consistent, comparable and decision-useful information on these risks.

Suitable for use by all companies that raise capital, the TCFD recommends:

- establishing consistent and comparable metrics applicable across all sectors, as well as specific metrics for the most carbon-intensive sectors;
- including guidance on disclosure of governance and risk management arrangements, with the expectation that these risks are managed at board level and fully embedded into existing governance frameworks;
- encouraging use of scenario analysis to consider the potential future impact of the risks and opportunities of the transition to a low-carbon economy on strategy and financial planning.

Only four years after the TCFD recommendations were published, support has skyrocketed, and private finance is increasingly focused on the opportunities and risks in the transition. Every major systemic bank, along with the world’s largest insurers, biggest pension funds and top asset managers are calling for the disclosure of climate-related financial risk through their support of the TCFD. In January 2020, the International Business Council of 140 CEOs called for TCFD disclosure. And the UN Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI) announced that all 2,275 signatories must make TCFD disclosures or risk ejection from the group.

The private sector is responding, with four fifths of the top 1,100 G20 companies

now disclosing climate-related financial risks in line with some of the TCFD recommendations.

The significant private, voluntary momentum in recent years on reporting is welcome, but now needs public coordination.

Making TCFD disclosure mandatory would increase the quantity and quality of disclosure while levelling the playing field across sectors and maximising the prospect that what gets measured will be managed.

Crises increase the focus on resilience

Every crisis calls into question aspects of how we value, and what our values are. That’s because crises have value – or rather misvaluation – at their heart.

The global financial crisis was caused in part by the underpricing of risks and the surrendering of supervisory judgement to the perceived wisdom of the market. Before the global financial crisis, major banks were woefully undercapitalised, with complex business models that relied on the goodwill of markets and, ultimately, the support of taxpayers.

The COVID-19 crisis partly reflects years of undervaluing health, despite ample and varied warnings. The annual cost of advanced preparations would have been less than the value of one day’s lost economic output this year.

The climate crisis arises because in the tragedy of the commons we’re not fully pricing the externalities of pollution. We’re effectively ignoring the costs of environmental degradation and species loss. Moreover, in what I’ve previously described as the tragedy of the horizon, we’re undervaluing the future, creating a terrible legacy for future generations.

Applying this lesson to the climate crisis

The good news is that it is possible to test resilience to climate risks and plan accordingly. Climate change presents both physical and transition risks.

Physical risks damage property and disrupt trade. Transition risks result from the adjustment towards a lower-carbon economy. Changes in policies, technologies and physical risks will prompt a reassessment of the value of a large range of assets as costs

and opportunities become apparent. The longer that meaningful adjustment is delayed, the more transition risks will rise.

The nature of these risks means that the biggest challenge in climate risk management is in assessing the resilience of firms' strategies to transition risks. This information will help reveal which companies will seize the opportunities in the transition to a net-zero world and which will cease to exist.

For central banks, that means stress-testing major banks and insurers against different climate pathways. These include: the catastrophic business-as-usual scenario; the ideal (but still challenging) transition to net zero by 2050; and the late policy action – or climate 'Minsky moment' which defines a point in time where the sudden decline in market sentiment and major collapse in asset values leads to a crash – scenario that could result in a sudden recognition of the scale of stranded assets and economy-wide disruption.

With 80 per cent of the world's known coal reserves, 30 per cent of oil and 50 per cent of gas reserves considered un-burnable if we want to keep emissions below 2°C, uncovering information about which companies and economies are exposed will be critical. Climate stress-testing of the financial system, for example, will reveal the financial firms – and, by extension, the companies – that are preparing for the transition. It will also expose those that are not.

Companies will need to look through their supply chain and understand where they are vulnerable to physical and transition risks. This year, BP cut its long-run oil forecast by \$20 a barrel and raised its long-run shadow carbon price from \$40 to \$100 a tonne – three times the European benchmark level – as part of a strategic review. These judgements about the pace of the energy transition led to write-downs of £11 billion of assets and highlighted the attractiveness of emerging energy sources. This type of forward planning and early action is exactly what we need for a smooth transition.

Climate stress-testing and scenario analysis is, however, a nascent field. That's why authorities and banks are working

together to develop climate risk management capabilities. The Network for Greening the Financial System (NGFS), a coalition of 70 central banks from countries representing two thirds of the world's emissions, has published open-source scenarios that any company in any sector can use to access their strategic resilience.

The scenarios include: an early and orderly transition; a late and disorderly transition; and a failure of transition where physical risk crystallises. NGFS have also included five alternative scenarios to help test the impact of different assumptions, such as technology development or physical risk changes. These are baseline scenarios that can and will be adapted to different sectors. They will provide a useful insight into resilience against different climate outcomes.

Crises trigger economic and social resets

The global financial crisis showed what happens when capitalism loses its sense of moderation, when the belief in the power of the market enters the realm of faith. In the decades prior to the crisis, such radicalism came to dominate economic ideas and became a pattern of social behaviour. Market fundamentalism – in the form of light-touch regulation, the belief that bubbles cannot be identified and that markets always clear – contributed directly to the financial crisis and the associated erosion of social capital.

Perhaps the most severe blow to public trust was the revelation that there were scores of too-big-to-fail institutions operating at the heart of finance. Bankers made enormous sums in the run-up to the crisis and were often well compensated after it hit. In turn, taxpayers picked up the tab for their failures. That unjust sharing of risk and reward contributed directly to inequality but – more importantly – had a corrosive effect on the broader social fabric of which finance is part and on which it relies. By replacing such implicit privilege with the full discipline of the market, social capital can be rebuilt and economic dynamism increased.

The COVID-19 crisis is also prompting a reassessment of how the system operates. It is accelerating change in the economy and new drivers of value are emerging. The

world is shifting from moving atoms to bits, as e-commerce replaces bricks and mortar and activities become digital by default. Supply chains are also reorienting from global and just-in-time to local and just-in-case. And consumer attitudes are changing as entire populations experience the fears of the unemployed and the anxieties of inadequate or inaccessible healthcare.

Alongside this economic reset, a social reset is underway. In this crisis, we have acted as interdependent communities, not independent individuals. The values of economic dynamism and efficiency have been joined by those of solidarity, fairness, responsibility and compassion. The realities of inequality have been exposed. We are all in the same storm but not all in the same boat. Events have brought greater attention to inequalities: of low-paid key workers, of the incidence of disease, of the burden of unpaid care work, and of education.

There is now a greater value on resilience. As I mentioned, the COVID-19 tragedy proves we cannot wish away systemic risks and that we need to invest upfront to avoid disaster down the road. A valuable conversation about the importance of systemic resilience has emerged. This means taking an approach that acknowledges the range of threats to the global system, and reconsiders the priority that the present economic system has given to optimisation and efficiency over preparedness for such threats.

Using this momentum to build the future, not rebuild the past

The COVID-19 crisis will prompt a massive reallocation of capital. That means we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build a competitive, sustainable economy for all. The right fiscal and policy frameworks can help deliver dividends for the economy and environment.

Fiscal spending will need to focus forward and on green investment. Major home retrofitting to improve energy efficiency of buildings could create new green jobs and support more working from home. Differentiated subsidies and investment in charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs) could raise demand and help

phase out internal combustion engines. Investment in electric grid infrastructure could help attract private investment and create three times as many jobs as in the fossil fuel industry.

The need for state support creates an opportunity to ensure that firms are part of the sustainable economy. The Canadian Government's relief package makes TCFD disclosure a condition for firms to receive bailout money. The French Government's bailout of Air France requires the airline to halve emissions from domestic flights by 2024.

Alongside direct fiscal spend, the right regulation can frame the terms of the new economy. This includes, for example, banning the sale and rental of houses that do not meet energy efficiency standards. It means targets for carbon intensity for electricity generation, the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies, changing vehicle and fuel taxation, creating EV-only vehicle lanes and creating ultra-low emission zones in cities to incentivise the move to EVs.

The decision between a low-emissions or high-growth (job-creating) trajectory is not zero sum. There is a growing body of evidence that clean-energy investment generates far more employment than does other energy forms: one recent study by Heidi Garrett-Peltier in *Economic Modelling* suggests that the same amount of investment in renewable energy over fossil fuel industries generates two to three times the number of jobs. Policymakers are developing menus of options for delivering a green and resilient post-pandemic recovery, and we should look to these efforts for a pathway into the new economy.

The finance sector in turn needs the tools and incentives to support the transition. Achieving the Paris Agreement objective of limiting global temperature rise to less than 2°C requires a whole-economy transition. We therefore need to ensure that every professional financial decision takes climate change into account. Alongside the fiscal and regulatory instruments described above, we need to ensure that the right financial frameworks are in place so that capital allocators can align investments with the low-carbon and resilient trajectory. In effect,

this means focusing on the three Rs of reporting, risk and return.

Systemic resilience-planning is becoming a growing imperative for firms and investors. In 2020, concerned citizens and investors have put greater pressure on firms to account for a wider range of environmental, social and governance factors. Financial institutions

take into account how climate change will impact their business, as well as how they contribute to climate change.

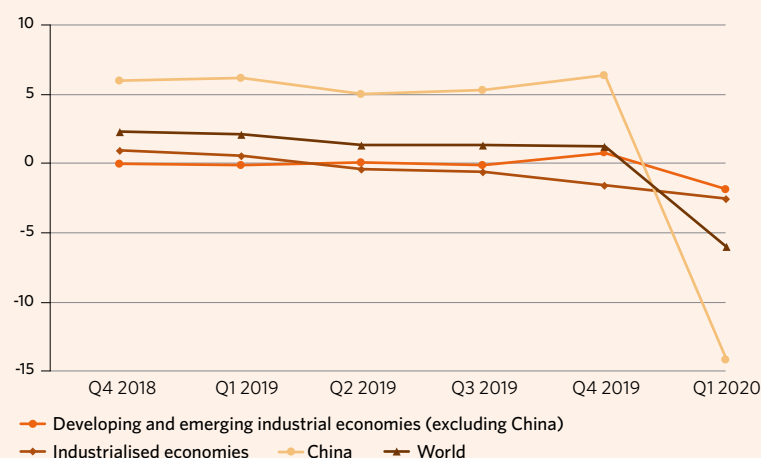
For COP26, the private finance work is aiming to arm the financial sector with the tools to enable the system to do this effectively, and to leverage the finance needed for the global transition. ●

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

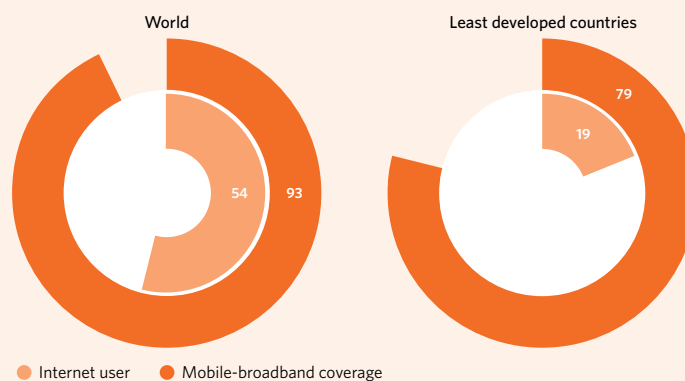


Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

Quarterly growth rate of manufacturing output compared to the same quarter the previous year, fourth quarter of 2018 to the first quarter of 2020 (percentage)



Proportion of population covered by a mobile-broadband signal and using the internet, 2019 estimate (percentage)



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

The impact on education

The pandemic threatens to undo recent gains in access to learning, damage the long-term prospects of millions, and push the goal of equitable, quality education for all beyond reach. Governments must urgently prioritise education as part of their pandemic response, with a focus on protecting marginalised groups

By **Prachi Srivastava**, Associate Professor, Western University, Canada

COVID-19 has caused the largest mass disruption of education in history. Education disruption initially peaked in April 2020, when more than 190 countries instituted country-wide closures resulting in 90 per cent of learners – over 1.5 billion people – being forced out of school and education institutions. Another 100 million were affected by localised closures in six countries. Additionally, 258 million children were already out of school: 30 per cent due to conflict and emergency, and the rest because of entrenched inequities, according to estimates by the Overseas Development Institute and UNESCO. These circumstances will be exacerbated by the pandemic.

The UN has warned that coronavirus threatens progress on all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and may reverse gains already made. The gravity of mass education disruption on SDG 4 (quality education) cannot be overstated. Furthermore, education does not operate in a silo. Education disruption will have implications on the five other SDGs with direct reference to education: SDG 3 (health and well-being, target 3.7); SDG 5 (gender equality, target 5.6); SDG 8

(decent work and sustainable growth, target 8.6); SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production, target 12.8); and SDG 13 (climate change mitigation, target 13.3).

While there were pre-pandemic gaps in education, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, globally, we experienced a sustained period of improvements, especially in basic education. There was near universal enrolment in primary levels, substantial increases in secondary, and significant improvements in gender parity.

However, the pandemic exposes the fragility of education access and quality, and of those gains.

At the time of writing, UNESCO estimates that almost seven months after the COVID-19 emergency was declared a pandemic, nearly one billion children and youth still have not returned to school or have resumed their education in deeply precarious circumstances. This is staggering.

The pandemic will exacerbate existing inequities in education and create new ones in all countries, with deeper implications for low-resource and crisis and emergency

► A 16-year-old student leads an outdoor class in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The children in the low-income neighbourhood of Realidad de Dios have been unable to attend virtual classes during the pandemic





© Santiago Arcos/Reuters/Alamy Stock Photo

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

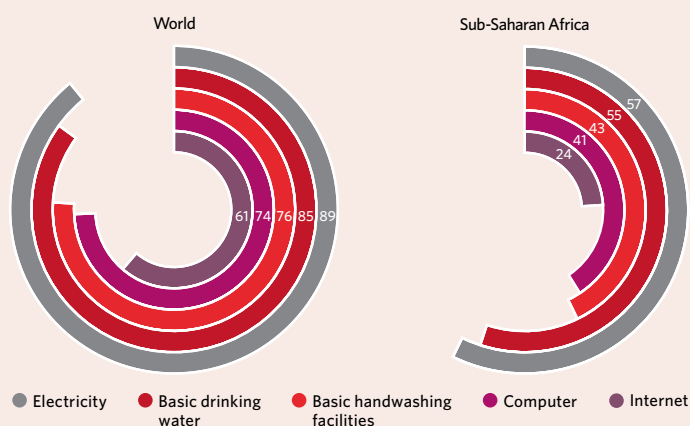
School closures during the pandemic kept **90%** of all students out of school, reversing years of progress



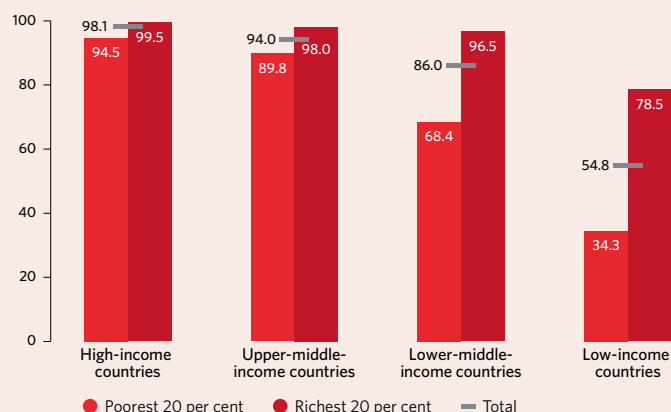
Remote learning remains out of reach for at least **500 million** students



Proportion of schools with access to basic school resources globally and in sub-Saharan Africa, upper secondary, 2016-2018 (latest) (percentage)



Primary school completion rate, 2014-2018 (percentage)



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

contexts. It will have different institutional and individual effects. In other words, the effects of the pandemic on education disruption will vary within and across different countries and social groups.

A resilient recovery will be affected by the capacity, supply and financing issues that characterised education systems going into the pandemic, new pandemic-related obligations on states, and the level of crisis preparedness that governments and education systems had in place.

Leaving learners behind

The existing learning crisis meant that more than 407 million children and youth entered the pandemic without having mastered basic skills, despite having had some formal schooling. These learning gaps will be deepened, and new gaps will emerge, particularly for learners who were and are excluded from remote and distance learning.

First responses in many countries were led by a rapid shift to emergency online learning. This is not appropriate or feasible for all learners, contexts, levels or subjects, and is worsened by the digital divide – a gap that disproportionately affects girls and women, lower-income households and remote populations in all regions. Furthermore, the needs of learners with disabilities tend to be neglected when emergency changes to delivery modes are made.

Initial global estimates by UNESCO indicated that more than 500 million children and youth could not access distance learning during the first phase of school closures. Furthermore, systems were not prepared to support teachers, facilitators and parents or caregivers in optimally using technologies for learning. Studies of context-specific first responses are nascent. Two rapid assessments indicate similar patterns.

In India, a survey by Oxfam India of nearly 1,200 parents and 500 teachers in five states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh) found that a combined 80 per cent of parents accessing private and government schools reported that no education was delivered during lockdown. In Ethiopia, a survey of 127 school principals and 316 teachers across

seven diverse regional states and one city administration found rural–urban gaps in access to electricity and technologies such as radio, television and the internet complicated the delivery of remote and distance education (Yorke, L., Rose, P., Hagos Hailu, B., & Woldehanna, T. (2020).). The same survey found that only 57 per cent of urban teachers and 45 per cent of rural teachers were able to provide support to students during school closures, mainly face to face. The teachers indicated that there were efforts to make adaptations for disadvantaged groups, including girls, students from low-income families and low-performing students. However, they felt

as the need for even smaller class sizes is heightened to safely reopen schools. Teachers are key to improving education quality and learning outcomes. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimated in 2016 that there was a 68.8 million shortfall of teachers to achieve SDG 4: 24.4 million in primary and 44.4 million in secondary. It forecast that an additional 3.4 million primary and 16.7 million secondary teachers were required to expand access to education, reduce class sizes and replace staff lost to attrition. Supply is also an issue regarding single-classroom and single-teacher schools, and in conflict and existing emergency contexts.

disparities. A 2015 analysis by UNICEF showed that the share of public resources allocated to the top 10 per cent most educated students was highest in low-income countries (46 per cent), followed by lower-middle-income countries (26 per cent), but nearly at parity in upper middle-income and high-income countries (13 per cent). These disparities raise serious concerns as the most educated students tend to come from advantaged backgrounds.

Finally, aid to education has been volatile. In 2018, official development assistance disbursements to education reached their highest-ever recorded levels, according to a recent analysis by the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report Team. But, this was after a long period of relative stagnation from its previous high point in 2010.

The GEM Report Team warns that the economic effects of COVID-19 could result in a fall of up to \$2 billion in aid to education by 2022, and that it could take another six years until the levels of 2018 are reached again. It recommends that the share of education aid must be protected, that there should be additional flexible funding for COVID-19 and education, and that bilateral donors should consider consolidating fragmented aid through multilateral channels.

Right to education

In countries with large proportions of people living in poverty, engaged in informal labour, and with restricted social safety nets, potential death or serious illness caused by hunger, starvation and other diseases may be more compelling than COVID-19. However, the pandemic has aggravated these conditions. This puts the transformative effects of education on health outcomes, infant and child survival, girls' and women's empowerment, employment and economic growth even more starkly into focus.

The unalienable right to education remains. Prioritising education is key to long-term economic recovery and social stability, without which the future of sustainable development for all will be irrecoverable. ●

References are available from the author.

Initial global estimates by UNESCO indicated that more than 500 million children and youth could not access distance learning during the first phase of school closures

that these students were also the least likely to benefit from distance learning.

Capacity problems

Several capacity and supply issues threaten safe school operations and the implementation of physical distancing measures. Firstly, putting in place even the most basic measures for safe school reopening is compromised in many countries. The 2018 World Health Organization and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) global baseline report found that only 53 per cent of schools surveyed in 81 countries had basic hygiene services, defined as a handwashing facility with soap and water. Over 850 million children attended schools without these services, highlighting the urgency to upgrade basic physical infrastructure.

Secondly, the pandemic will affect the supply of teaching and education personnel. The gaps are more acute in some countries. The pandemic is exacerbating these pressures. In some cases, unplanned attrition due to health and safety concerns may combine with existing staff shortages

Urgent need for equitable finance

An analysis by the World Bank stresses that the pandemic has created a need for increased domestic education spending. However, it finds that there is “evidence that some countries are already cutting their education budgets to make space for the required spending on health and social protection”. This will exacerbate education sector constraints, as education systems were already inadequately and inequitably financed.

One in three countries entered the pandemic with under-resourced education systems, according to UNESCO. Another World Bank analysis showed that, while public education expenditure increased across all country-income groups between 1999 and 2015, with much higher average increases in low-income countries, spending was relatively constant as a proportion of GDP.

There are also great disparities in per-child allocations. Before the pandemic, high-income countries were spending on average 43 times as much per child in primary education as low-income countries. Even within countries, there are spending



© Andrew Redington/Getty Images

COVID-19 exposes a pandemic of inequality

The pandemic has revealed deep disparities in people's access to healthcare, education and job security. Global responses must reduce, not exacerbate, problems of access

By **Raj S. Bhopal**, Emeritus Professor of Public Health, Ethnicity and Health Research Group, University of Edinburgh

Epidemiology studies the patterns of diseases in populations to seek differences in their occurrence, severity and mortality. By analysing differences, epidemiology helps to understand the burden of disease and its causes. Epidemiology underpins public health, which is the collective activity of societies to promote health, prevent disease and prolong life.

◀ London, UK, a woman walks past a mural supporting the National Health Service. Despite the NHS being free to all, there have been pronounced differences in outcome for COVID patients according to their ethnicity

Differences in health status are normal, inevitable and ineradicable because they reflect a combination of biology, environments and ways of life. In recent decades, the word ‘inequalities’ – meaning differences – has become associated with unfairness and injustice, sometimes the result of the way societies are organised and resources shared. Such inequalities are sometimes described as inequities or disparities.

Huge inequalities have existed over the last few hundred years, whether in life expectancy or disease incidence and outcome, or healthcare availability and use. Inequalities are easily demonstrated by analysing health and healthcare data by descriptors of populations (called variables). These include age group, sex, gender, occupation, socio-economic position, country of birth and ethnic or racial group.

COVID-19 has cruelly exposed inequalities in disease incidence and mortality. For example, Public Health England’s report in June 2020, *Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19*, showed large inequalities using a range of indicators including ethnic group. Black British populations, for example, had about four times the occurrence and mortality from COVID-19 compared with White British ones. The disparities diminished after adjusting statistically for several socio-economic factors, indicating firstly that the differences could mostly be attributed to them and secondly the deep racial inequality of British society.

Contagious infections spread by human interaction, including respiratory ones, are invariably commonest in poor populations. This arises from, among other factors, higher incidences of being homeless or living or working in overcrowded areas, working in service jobs and thereby being exposed to potentially infected people, and using public transport. This increases the exposure to the virus and leads to a higher number of cases.

The number of adverse outcomes – whether severe illness, hospitalisation, admission to intensive care or death – is roughly proportionate to the incidence of infection, and is therefore highest in poor populations.

Differing circumstances

There is, unfortunately, an extra twist. Adverse outcomes are even worse than expected. The explanations for this are complicated but relate to differences in life circumstances. For example, poor people tend to have worse diets and use tobacco products more. Especially where there are limited publicly funded services, poor people are less likely to seek, or delay seeking, high-quality medical advice. They are also less likely to be able to afford treatments that are not freely provided. There may also be differences in their quality of care. Their opportunity to recuperate fully may be reduced through their need to return to work to earn money to stave off abject poverty or even starvation.

With respect to COVID-19 we know mortality increases exponentially with age, is greater in men than women (especially in middle age), disproportionately affects the poor and service-based occupational groups and migrant workers, and unduly affects people in ethnic minority groups. The disease is particularly difficult for people who cannot work from home and those who rely upon a daily or weekly wage or have insecure employment contracts.

These problems are particularly acute in low and middle-income countries with a high proportion of poor people. It is therefore a minor blessing that this disease does not carry high risk of adverse outcomes in young people. Countries with a relatively low average age, which tend to be those same countries, have low mortality. While high-income countries have the resources to impose strict control measures and undertake comprehensive testing, they also have, on average, old populations at high risk of adverse outcomes if infected. The proportion of people dying after being diagnosed with COVID-19 (the case fatality rate) is just above 0 per cent for people under 25 but between 10 and 20 per cent in people over 80 years of age. This has considerable

implications for management of the pandemic worldwide.

The UK is one of the world’s wealthiest countries and a leader in biomedical and public health sciences and public health practice. It has a public health system and a National Health Service largely free at the point of delivery. The UK is reputed for the study of inequalities in health and in developing government-backed policies for appropriate responses. However, success in reducing inequalities has been limited in the UK, as internationally, notwithstanding governmental efforts. Reports on inequalities in COVID-19 in the UK have provided qualitative and quantitative evidence. These inequalities are by near-consensus unjust.

The demonstration of differences in both the incidence of and mortality from COVID-19 by ethnic group has, surprisingly, gained sustained media, governmental and professional attention. Inequalities of a similar scale for other conditions – whether infections including tuberculosis and hepatitis B, or chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes – have generated little attention. Ethnic inequalities in COVID-19 have also led to widespread consultation concluding that the inequities by ethnic group in the COVID-19 pandemic have been driven by systemic racism. This conclusion was published – to say the least reluctantly, but published nonetheless – by the UK government.

What is different about COVID-19? People in the UK on the front line of both commercial and public services – whether delivery of goods, provision of food, the care of the elderly or community-based and hospital-based medical care – are disproportionately from ethnic minority groups. These people have been extolled as public heroes. They are prominently featured in national news bulletins. Images of doctors and nurses, sometimes in the prime of life, many of them from ethnic minority populations, who have been seriously sick or have died while providing care in UK hospitals, have changed the dialogue.

The incompatibility has become clear between some of the UK’s policies – such as the lack of recourse to public funds to those without leave to remain and on certain kinds

of entry visas – and the imperative to involve everyone in the battle against the pandemic. The UK Government has made COVID-19-related healthcare free to everyone in the country, including undocumented migrants. However, it has taken campaigning by community organisations and professionals to push the government to this limited action.

COVID-19 has demonstrated more than other diseases that managing the infection is not enough. We also have to manage the comorbidities that lead to the adverse consequences, such as obesity, diabetes, immune disorders and cardiovascular disease.

The UK's experience indicates that being wealthy and able to provide healthcare free at the point of utilisation are not of themselves enough to prevent inequality in health. Equality requires proactive action targeted at the neediest groups. It cannot merely be spread across the population as a whole on a wide range of matters, whether employment opportunities and rights, workplace safeguards, income, housing, education, equality legislation or community relations.

Indeed, community relations between UK populations, including ethnic groups, have remained reasonably good, with fewer reports of overt prejudice and stigma against certain communities than in many peer nations. Internationally, the situation is more turbulent. The pandemic is fuelling inequity across the globe and impairing relationships between countries and between communities within them.

Nations and the global community must ensure that our responses to the pandemic, whether from lockdowns, isolation, competition for scarce resources, the race to develop treatments and vaccines, and rhetoric do not do more harm than the virus we are battling. As we go through this pandemic, the UN and its agencies, including the World Health Organization and others, have a vital role to play to coordinate our international responses and to safeguard health, especially among the world's poorest. ●

The author thanks Ms Rosie Coombe and Mrs Roma Bhopal for careful reading and feedback on this article. References are available from the author.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

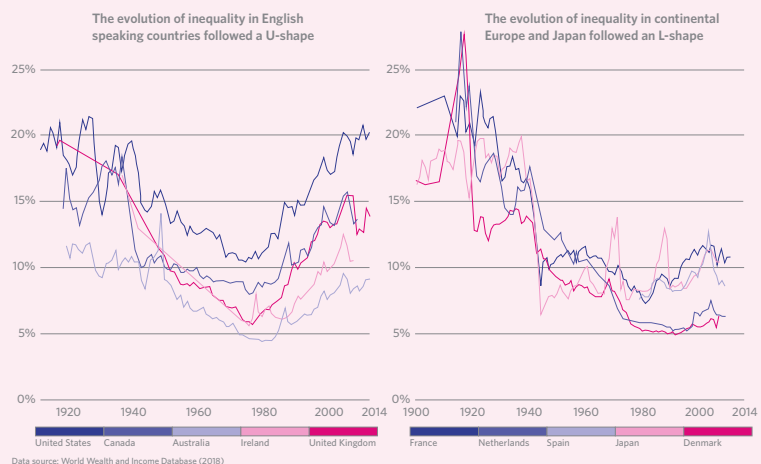


Reduce inequality within and among countries

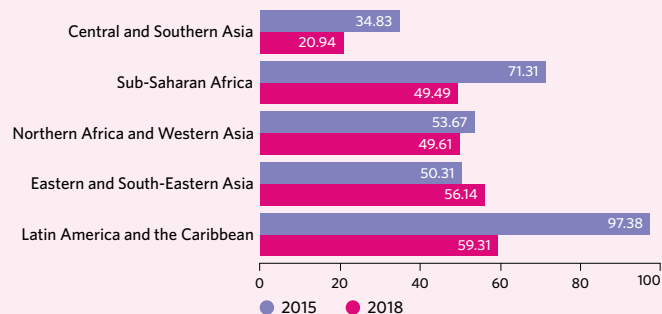
The most vulnerable groups are being hit hardest by the pandemic



Share of total income going to the top 1% since 1900



Total resource flows for development to developing countries, by region of recipient, 2015 and 2018 (billions of dollars)



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020



Strengthening social protection

COVID-19 has cruelly exposed the weaknesses in nations' social protection systems. We must urgently learn from this crisis to better protect people, both from the pandemic fallout and from future crises

By **Shahra Razavi**, Director, and **Ian Orton**, Policy Officer, Social Protection Department, International Labour Organization (ILO)

The COVID-19 pandemic started as a major public health challenge, but quickly morphed into a protracted socio-economic crisis with which countries are still grappling. According to the ILO's latest global estimates, employment has declined significantly, as measured by a 17.3 per cent reduction in working hours for the third quarter of 2020 compared with the last quarter of 2019. This is equivalent to

495 million full-time jobs. In 2020 alone, up to 100 million people may be pushed into extreme poverty, reversing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The World Food Programme has warned that heightened food insecurity will affect millions more people in low and middle-income countries.

Social protection systems have been the first line of defence against the negative impacts of the crisis on people's health, livelihoods and incomes. Most states have taken measures to facilitate effective access to healthcare, while supporting job and

income security for those most affected, though many of the measures have been temporary. In terms of domestic efforts, as of 3 September 2020, more than 196 countries have introduced expansionary fiscal measures, totalling approximately \$10.6 trillion (if we include social protection, healthcare and other measures). However,

▲ People queue to receive food aid at the Itireleng informal settlement, Pretoria, South Africa. The lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the country created an upsurge in the numbers experiencing hunger

most of these fiscal resources have been concentrated in high-income countries, creating a 'stimulus gap'. Indeed, we are likely to emerge from this crisis even more unequal than we entered it.

The effects of the pandemic have also been highly uneven within countries, reinforcing existing inequalities and social cleavages. Those who are better off are more likely to have secure employment and savings to draw on, access to social protection and health coverage. They are also better able to quarantine or socially distance themselves while continuing to work remotely.

The relative decline in employment has been greater for women than for men because they have been disproportionately employed in sectors hardest hit by the shutdowns, and are over-represented in front-line jobs, which are at greatest risk of exposure to coronavirus. With the closure or disruption of schools, childcare centres and long-term care institutions, unpaid care responsibilities have intensified to a greater extent for women than for men.

Depending on their contracts, migrants may be among the first to lose their jobs, and face significant barriers to re-entering the workforce. They also face multiple hurdles in accessing social protection, due to the informality of their labour situation, or lack of citizenship or legal residency.

How should policy respond?

While the pandemic is still with us, and the evidence of its impacts are insufficiently conclusive to allow proper cross-country evaluations, efforts to contain its socio-economic impacts have varied considerably across countries. Based on emerging evidence, we can say that the hallmarks of good policy response comprise five core elements.

First, policy interventions must be commensurate with the magnitude of the labour market disruptions they seek to attenuate. In high-income countries, the announced fiscal stimulus measures equate to 10.1 per cent of total working hours, while estimated working-hour losses averaged 9.4 per cent. These measures were large enough to offset most of the contraction. In low-income countries,

by contrast, the stimulus is equivalent to only 1.2 per cent of total working hours, while working-hour losses averaged 9 per cent. This underlines the significance of fiscal capacity and the imperative of mobilising resources from diverse sources. While domestic resource mobilisation will inevitably be the cornerstone of national social protection systems, for low-income countries international support is critical. It is imperative that countries sustain their levels of social spending when the immediate health crisis subsides, to ensure that people are protected against adverse economic and social consequences and to counter the danger of growing poverty, joblessness and exclusion.

Second, having a social protection system in place before a crisis hits makes a huge difference to national preparedness. Countries that already had strong social protection systems were able to rapidly guarantee access to much-needed healthcare, ensure income security and protect jobs. Countries without strong social protection systems in place have had to adopt measures under duress, sometimes with a fair degree of improvisation.

Third, the nature of social protection systems already in place also makes a big difference. Social protection systems have been more effective if they provide universal, or close to universal, coverage and adequate benefit levels that prevent poverty, and deliver comprehensive provision covering all life-cycle risks. The crisis has laid bare some of the major gaps in social protection systems. For example, nearly 40 per cent of the world's population has no health insurance or access to national health services. Figures from the World Health Organization and World Bank suggest some 800 million people spend at least 10 per cent of their household budget on healthcare each year, and 100 million people fall into poverty because of medical expenses. This means that many simply lack the wherewithal to seek treatment when they are sick, including from COVID-19.

Compounding the problem, an overwhelming majority of workers lack the income security to take sick leave. With less than two thirds of all countries having a social insurance or social assistance

scheme in place providing sickness benefits, the ill are often forced to choose between endangering personal and public health and paying their bills.

Unemployment protection is also severely inadequate, despite its critical role in supporting household incomes and stabilising aggregate demand. While close to 500 million full-time equivalent jobs have been imperilled, only one in five unemployed people worldwide can count on unemployment benefits.

The fourth element of a good policy response must be to address the dissonance between social protection systems and the labour market, which otherwise dampens policy responsiveness. The lack of social protection for the two billion informal economy workers – 61.2 per cent of the world's labour force – and their families makes them particularly vulnerable to shocks. Invariably, they cannot count on social insurance protection, nor are they well served by narrow social assistance schemes. In the context of COVID-19, some countries, such as Germany and the UK, have extended sickness benefits and unemployment protection to previously excluded workers. A pre-COVID example of promising practice, where labour market and social protection policy cohere, is the recent extension of contributory mechanisms to workers in the informal economy, as seen in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, which can carry a triple dividend: contributing to formalisation, broadening the tax base, and liberating resources from social assistance.

Fifth, even where countries have social protection systems with high legal coverage, adequate and comprehensive provision can fail to reach their intended beneficiaries if delivery systems are weak and entitlements are not easy to access. To ensure high take-up of benefits it is critical that procedures are simplified, benefit information is widely available (in different languages) and uptake is not hampered by onerous eligibility requirements.

One salutary outcome of the crisis has been the temporary removal of cumbersome and punitive behavioural conditionalities frequently attached to family-oriented cash transfers targeted to women in low-

income households. These conditional cash transfers have been widely promoted over the past two decades as a means of reducing poverty in households with children. As research shows, conditionalities can have detrimental consequences where quality public services are absent. Programme requirements (for example, children having regular health checks) can easily slip into coercive practices and obstacles that women from marginalised communities must overcome to access the benefits.

Moving forward

The state of the world today gives us a glimpse of the social and economic disruptions that are likely to ensue as the ongoing climate crisis wreaks havoc on people and planet. The pandemic has served as a much-needed reality check, alerting us to our unpreparedness to respond to such systemic shocks in a just and equitable way.

To move forward, not only do countries need to mobilise more resources to invest in social protection systems, they also need to invest better. This means investing in systems that:

- provide comprehensive and adequate protection for all while avoiding exclusionary design features;
- are rights-based and have redress and accountability mechanisms;
- are based on social dialogue with workers and employers' organisations as well as other relevant representatives;
- utilise diverse financing mechanisms;
- are based on solidarity.

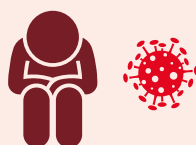
Much more remains to be done to streamline the policy frameworks of the UN system and the international financial institutions with internationally agreed human rights principles, especially when it comes to fiscal policies, so that they accommodate, rather than undermine, much-needed investments in universal social protection.

Today we stand at a crossroads. We can turn the COVID-19 crisis into an opportunity to build robust social protection systems. Or we can stumble zombie-like through this crisis and leave ourselves exposed and unprepared for future shocks. ●

1 NO POVERTY



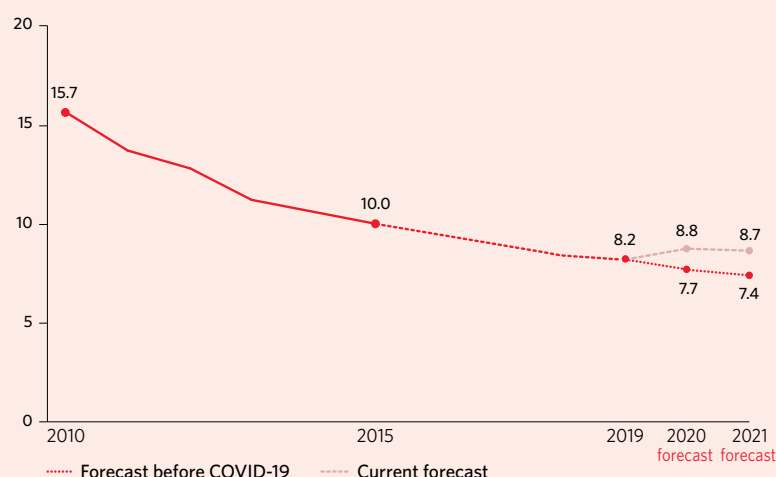
End poverty in all its forms everywhere



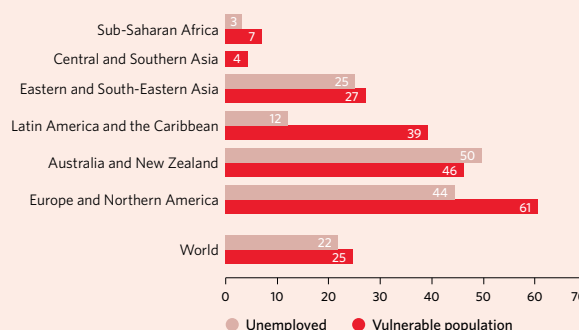
COVID-19 causes the first increase in global poverty in decades

+71 million people are pushed into extreme poverty in 2020

Proportion of people living below \$1.90 a day, 2010-2015, 2019 nowcast, and forecast before and after COVID-19 (percentage)



Proportion of vulnerable population receiving social assistance cash benefits, and unemployed persons receiving unemployment cash benefits, 2019 (percentage)



4 billion people did not benefit from any form of social protection in 2016



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

Protecting our elders

COVID-19 has had devastating effects on older people. The pandemic shows us that building back better must be about creating inclusive, healthy societies for all ages

By **Natalia Kanem**, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

The coronavirus pandemic, with its deadly impact on older people, is a wake-up call. As the world gears up to build back better and greener, we absolutely must use this crisis as an opportunity to fundamentally rethink how we see and treat older people in society. This will be even more pressing as the world's population is now ageing rapidly: by the year 2050, one in six people globally will be over age 65, compared with one in 11 in 2019.

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed huge fault lines in our societies. It has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable, including the poor, minorities and, especially, older people.

Symptomatic individuals in their 70s are 20 times more likely to need hospitalisation

society, often living in poverty and isolation, or consigned to long-term care facilities. A culture of ageism had taken hold in many societies, with older people facing pervasive discrimination in healthcare, employment and many other spheres of their lives.

The pandemic has cruelly laid bare the devastating effects of these structural inequalities and deep-rooted biases on older people. These include denial of healthcare, worsening poverty and social isolation, abuse and neglect, as well as the dramatic effects on older people's mental health and well-being. All of these factors have contributed to the shocking death toll in long-term care facilities across Europe and North America, which accounted for up to 50 per cent of all coronavirus-related fatalities at the peak of the pandemic (even though only up to 1 per cent of the population lives in them).

Already before the pandemic, many older people were confined to the margins of society, often living in poverty and isolation, or consigned to long-term care facilities

because of COVID-19 than young adults, and after age 60 the risk of death from the disease climbs sharply. Much of the added risk appears biological in nature: older people generally have more underlying medical conditions, which put them at higher danger of severe illness when they catch the virus.

Yet there is a social dimension that is perhaps less visible but no less worrisome. Already before the pandemic, many older people were confined to the margins of

Yet this huge toll that the pandemic has taken on older people was not inevitable. The data we have reveals vast differences between countries. If we look at fatality rates, for example, we see that in South Korea 25 per cent of people aged 80 or older with confirmed cases of COVID-19 have died, much lower than in many countries in Europe or the Americas. And in Japan, the country with the oldest population in the world, the fatality rate among people in nursing homes is 14 per



cent, significantly lower than the rates in comparable countries. Clearly, age alone is not the determining factor. These figures suggest that varying conditions and responses can make a big difference.

The immediate priority remains making sure older people are not left alone during the ongoing pandemic. This requires urgent support to national health and social



© David Ramos/Getty Images

systems so that they can cope with the crisis. UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, together with its partners, is assisting these efforts – for example, by providing protective equipment, guidelines and training for staff in nursing homes, and information materials for older people on how to protect themselves from the virus.

Young volunteers mobilised by UNFPA in several countries have stepped up to help break their elders' social isolation. In Moldova, for example, where many children grow up with grandparents because their parents are abroad for work, the pandemic provides an opportunity for young people to show gratitude to the older generation and intergenerational solidarity. They

▲ A resident of a nursing home near Barcelona, Spain touches hands with relatives, separated by a window. Older people, particularly those in nursing homes, have been among the hardest hit by COVID-19

check in regularly on older people in their community, spend time with them and offer help in carrying out daily routines.

As governments grapple with increasing trends in ageing, UNFPA is working closely with leaders and partners to revise population policies to ensure that older people's health, housing, social and financial needs are creatively embedded in national decision-making. In Mauritius, for example, UNFPA recently supported the government in developing a new population policy that pre-positioned the government to support older people when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived.

Beyond the immediate pandemic response, we must accelerate efforts to build societies that protect and ensure the health, inclusion and dignity of people of all ages. This is not only a human rights imperative, but a precondition for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and for countries and people to thrive in a world of rapid demographic change. It requires a fundamental shift away from seeing older people primarily as a burden, and towards acknowledging and nurturing the important role they play in society.

Making this shift a reality means enabling people to stay active and healthy, starting from a young age. It means offering life-long learning and opening up employment opportunities and other forms of engagement to older people, as the rigid line between working and retirement age disintegrates. And it means making serious efforts to combat ageism and the low value many societies attach to older people.

An ever-increasing number of countries worldwide are reshaping sectors like health, education, employment and social welfare to be able to better manage and cope with the effects of rapid demographic change while ensuring the rights and choices of an ageing population.

UNFPA and its partners are at the forefront of supporting these efforts in a variety of ways. In countries like Iran and Vietnam, UNFPA assists with developing

legal and policy frameworks for creating age-friendly environments. In Georgia, UNFPA programmes are supporting older people in remaining independent, active and involved in the community, learning new skills and passing on their knowledge and expertise to younger generations.

Today's older generation is an incredibly diverse group, and the cliché of the grey-haired, stooped, cane-carrying older person has little to do with the reality of an increasing number of people. Yet even though more and more people stay healthy and active well into old age, the pandemic has put into stark relief the vulnerabilities of those left behind. The most marginalised older people often face overlapping discrimination and barriers – for example, because they are poor, live with disabilities, are women living alone, or belong to minority groups.

Existing data often lumps all older people together into one category. As Claudia Mahler, the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, stated in her report to the UN Human Rights Council: “This lack of significant data and information on older persons is, in itself, an alarming sign of exclusion and renders meaningful policymaking and normative action practically impossible.”

This is why UNFPA launched its COVID-19 Population Vulnerability Dashboard in spring 2020, to highlight where older people are clustered, live alone or have no access to piped water, and to share data on the dramatic differences in COVID-19 health-sector readiness between countries. UNFPA works with governments across the world to strengthen data disaggregation by sex and age, and improve access to data on older people in all their diversity.

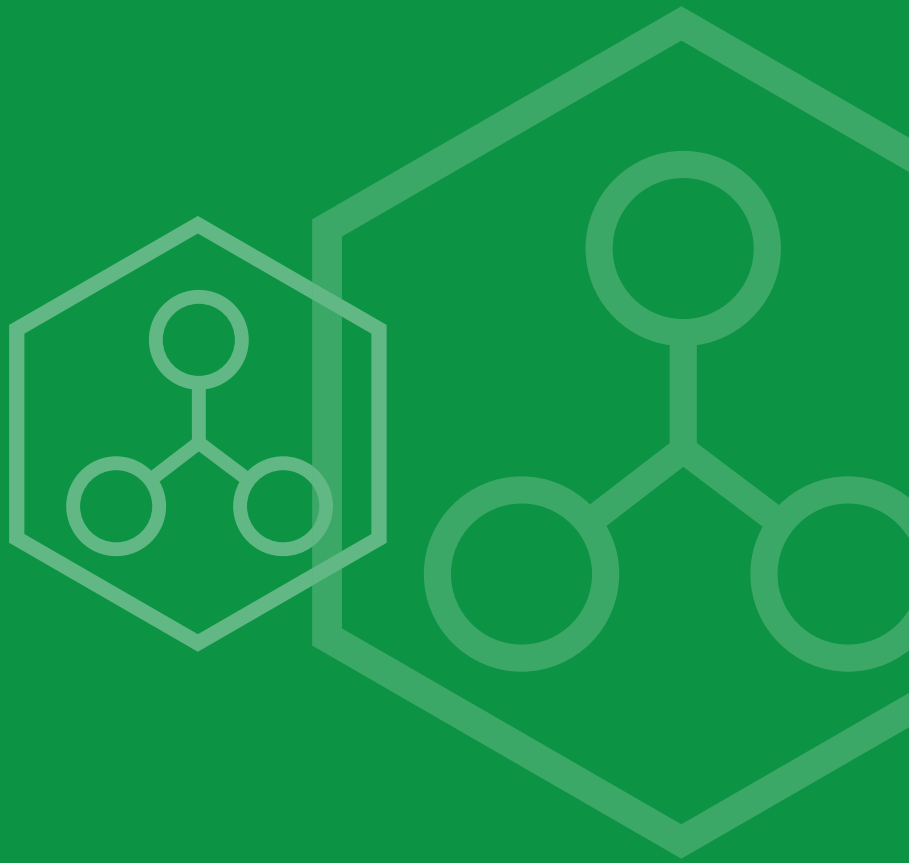
Together with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the World Health Organization and other UN partners, UNFPA is working hand in hand with HelpAge and other civil-society organisations to learn from the pandemic, uncover and address age-based discrimination, and share emerging models of how best to harness intergenerational solidarity.

COVID-19 puts the spotlight on a massive fissure in our common social fabric. We now have an opportunity to rectify past mistakes, listen to the voices of older people themselves, and get serious about the changes that need to happen. If we can make this crisis a turning point, older people and everyone will enjoy a world that is more just and equal – a world of health, well-being and dignity for all ages. ●

► In a camp in Idlib, Syria, a woman sits near the wreckage of her family's tent burnt by a fire from a gas stove. During displacement, old people often face a greater burden for care-giving as the number of orphaned children increases. At the same time, their traditional influence in society tends to diminish



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COVID-19 and emissions

Climate action is like a blustery day: the sun breaks through, only to be blocked by the next cloud on the horizon. Will COVID-19 hurt or help climate goals?



◀ Wildfires in Oroville, California. Global warming and changes to rain and snow patterns have increased the frequency and intensity of wildfires

Bank projects that its fallout will push 70 to 100 million more people into extreme poverty, reversing years of declines, most of them in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. India's economy has been hit particularly hard. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development projects that India's GDP will drop by 10 per cent this year. We cannot address a global climate crisis without also addressing social and economic inequities – within countries and across the globe.

In response to COVID-19, governments and central banks have yielded at least \$15 trillion in stimulus funds, close to one fifth of global GDP this year. Surprisingly little of this funding has gone to green energy and

In early April 2020, daily CO₂ emissions were down 17 per cent globally compared with the same day in 2019. The numbers were even more striking for individual countries, with average peak declines in fossil carbon emissions of 26 per cent. These declines were relatively short lived, however.

In fact, despite all of the economic upheaval and ongoing disruption, we estimate fossil carbon dioxide emissions this year will drop by 4 to 8 per cent from 2019's record of almost 37 billion metric tons. A decline in this range would be the largest since World War II, and perhaps ever. However, fossil CO₂ emissions will still approach 34 billion metric tons in 2020. Until we drive emissions down close to zero, our climate will continue to warm and people will suffer unnecessarily.

One of the reasons that most crises have not had a greater effect in reducing the climate problem is that they are, by definition, temporary. In the throes of

One of the reasons that most crises have not had a greater effect in reducing the climate problem is that they are, by definition, temporary

clean technology industries – less than 1 per cent, according to Bloomberg News. To date, we have missed the economic and climate opportunity the world seized with stimulus funds a decade ago, jump-starting the solar and wind industries and more. We will not get that money back.

Fossil carbon dioxide emissions will drop this year, but still be far from zero. Our work through the Global Carbon Project, led by colleague Corinne Le Quééré at the University of East Anglia, showed how rapid the declines have been. We developed near-real-time estimates of carbon dioxide emissions and gathered data across transportation, electricity, manufacturing and other industries. We then combined our new data with a confinement index that helped us understand how many billions of people were under shelter-at-home rules and other constraints to slow the spread of the virus.

the financial crisis of 2009, global carbon emissions fell by 1.4 per cent for one year. They then rose 5.1 per cent the next year when the global economy grew again, because energy production had not undergone structural changes. Emissions returned to normal when economic growth returned.

The relevance to COVID-19 is clear. Global GDP is projected to drop by 4.5 per cent this year but rise by 5 per cent in 2021. If that's the end of the story, we will not see lasting change from the effects of the virus on global carbon emissions.

In contrast, some transformations from COVID-19 seem likely and could reshape the global economy through climate action. The global electricity sector is starting to wean itself off coal, the most polluting of fossil fuels, and COVID-19 is speeding the transition. Coal consumption is down

By **Rob Jackson**, Professor, Earth System Science, Stanford University and Chair, Global Carbon Project

In the short term, COVID-19 has unquestionably made both climate action and accomplishing the UN Sustainable Development Goals more difficult. Hundreds of millions of people have lost their jobs because of the virus and the recessions it has spurred. COVID-19 has widened economic inequalities. The World

by half or more across the United States and Europe from its peak a decade or so ago, replaced by natural gas and, in places, renewables. The global economy has created far more new jobs in the wind and solar industries than it has lost in the coal sector. This energy transition is saving hundreds of thousands of lives, too, by reducing air pollution.

COVID-19 could certainly transform transportation, reducing consumption and enhancing the switch from fossil oil to renewables. Airline travel may never completely return to normal, or could take years to do so. As of mid-September 2020, the number of scheduled flights around the world is still down by half compared with the same week in 2019. In contrast, car and truck traffic have mostly returned to normal, and so have their emissions.

We must not squander the opportunity to reimagine transportation. Telecommuting is here to stay. Cities are rethinking mobility, with streets that were closed because of COVID-19 opening permanently only to pedestrians and cyclists. Clean energy coupled with electric cars could restore the blue skies that appeared like magic in cities around the world, without us having to stay home. Pollution from cars and coal still kills millions of people worldwide each year, even more than the incomprehensible loss from the virus so far. There are plenty of other good opportunities: clean energy storage, linking renewables to hydrogen production, a 'cash for clunkers' vehicle exchange programme, tying green strings to airline and auto bailouts, and helping farmers restore their soils.

The UN Environment Programme estimated last year that global emissions need to fall by 7.6 per cent every year until 2030 for the global temperature increase to stay below 1.5°C. We are likely to see such a decline this year – for one year only. Lockdowns requiring us to shelter at home, and global unemployment are not sustainable ways to cut emissions. Energy efficiency, personal choice, cleaning up the global energy sector while still supplying more energy for a billion people living in poverty – these are some of the things that we need to attain our climate goals. ●

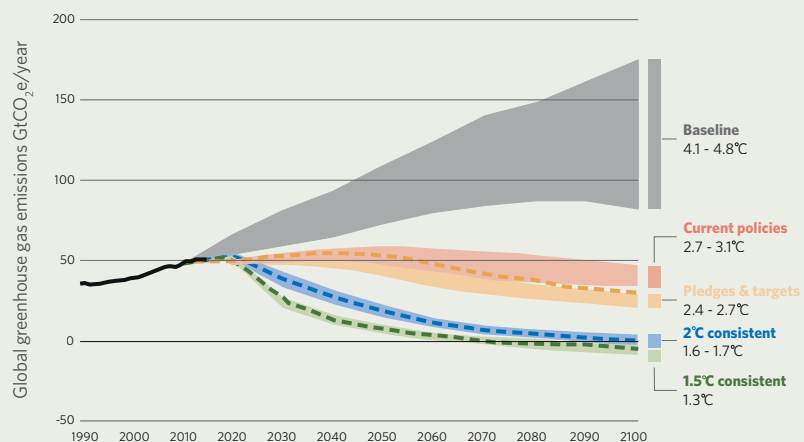
13 CLIMATE ACTION



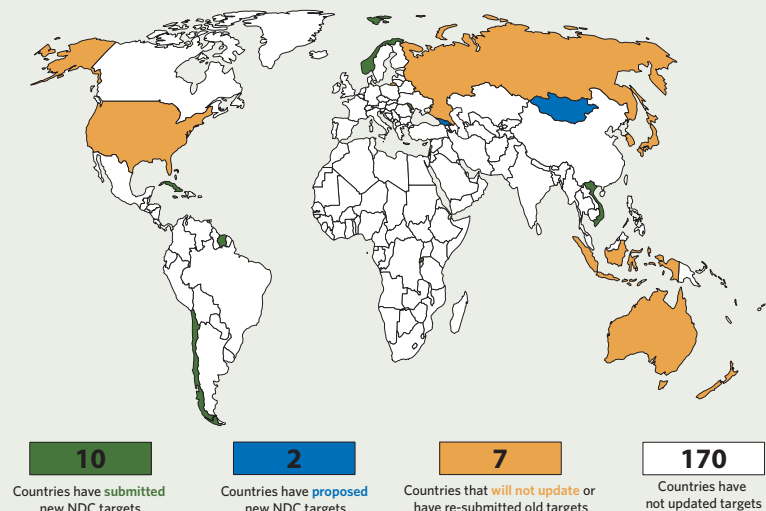
Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

2100 warming projections

Emissions and expected warming based on pledges and current policies.



Climate targets: status of the 2020 nationally determined contributions (NDCs) update process (last updated 20 September 2020)



When the Paris Agreement was made in 2015, governments formally acknowledged that their national climate targets collectively would not meet the goal of limiting warming to 1.5°C. They undertook to update their 2030 targets, which are part of a country's NDC, by 2020.

Source: Climate Action Tracker



© VCG via Getty Images

What now for cities?

Population-dense urban areas have been worst hit by the pandemic in terms of damage to health and economy. How can we make urban living safer and more resilient?

By **Maryke van Staden**, Director, Bonn Center for Local Climate Action and Reporting, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact in many countries, affecting millions of people, their livelihoods and the places where they live and work. This infectious disease not only impacts health, both physical and mental, but has dramatically impacted societies,

economies and many other spheres of life. From social distancing measures to the complete lockdowns that severely impact people's ability to work, the daily life of millions has been disrupted.

The pandemic has highlighted weaknesses in several aspects of human existence that need urgent attention, such as societal inequality, the vulnerability of basic service delivery, and the general lack of resilience in our systems, structures and

procedures across various sectors. The consequences of the pandemic (and the potential for other disasters that could strike at any moment) raise the question of how to protect the environment and people while dealing with global challenges like climate change. With urban areas predicted to host

▲ Low-carbon, green residential buildings in Chengdu, China, designed to create a vertical forest

more of the world's population (reaching 68 per cent by 2050, according to UN estimates), there is an urgent and growing need to reduce vulnerabilities in the towns and cities where people live and work.

Today, citizens and experts are asking what the 'new normal' would or could look like. It is time to be creative. There is a clear signal that we do not want to return to unsustainable and discriminatory practices. So how can we protect our fragile systems and cities? What are the essential components of flexible and more resilient urban areas? In short: how can we build back better?

Breadwinners and unemployment

Disruption of the economy has a knock-on effect. Due to COVID-19, some 400 million full-time jobs were lost in the second quarter of 2020 alone, especially in lower and middle-income countries. As a consequence the number of people living in extreme poverty rose by approximately 71 million, according to the UN Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. Cities and other urban areas have felt the brunt of the impact, including large cities like New York, London and New Delhi.

But the disruption has not only impacted cities. The extent to which urban and rural areas have been impacted has been different and varies considerably from country to country. According to the World Bank, income loss was experienced in Ethiopia in 60 per cent of urban households and 52 per cent of rural households, whereas in Mongolia the statistics show income loss in 81 per cent of urban homes and 19 per cent of rural homes. This loss of income will have an impact on governmental income tax generation. The impact on people and families, meanwhile, can be devastating.

Urban density and service delivery

Dense urban environments encourage more productive economies but also contribute to pollution and diseases. The pandemic has highlighted the urgent need to redesign several aspects of cities, and to make them more resilient to future shocks.

For example, public transportation systems

are typically designed to enable peak-time commuters to go to work and return home. The use of public transport has plummeted since the pandemic, with users uncertain about safety. Many operators have also reduced the number of rides – a counter-intuitive approach, especially considering the need for greater social distancing on the public transport system.

Compared with 2019, the rate of public transport use has decreased by more than 30 per cent in Seoul and Taipei City, and by a staggering 50 per cent in Busan City, according to figures from ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. In the Philippine island of Luzon and cities in Lao PDR, public transport has even been suspended. And the reduction in transport use is not only due to the

research from the International Renewable Energy Agency shows. The share of renewables in electricity generation has grown in many countries. This is good news for all countries on several fronts: renewable power plants have close to zero marginal costs, create new jobs in the green economy and cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Redesign, sustainable growth and recovery

Sustainable development creates conditions for healthier, wealthier and more resilient societies. For the COVID-19 recovery process, the redesign of urban areas – from removing zoning that embeds inequality, to enabling access to affordable green housing and clean energy for all – will be the

By linking re-growth and recovery to the SDGs – addressing poverty reduction, health and well-being, quality education, gender equality and responsible production and consumption – local and other tiers of government can push the reset button

reduction of supply: in Jakarta, where informal transport plays a vital role due to the limited capacity of public transport, the income of drivers has fallen by approximately 80 per cent.

Safe mobility needs to find a new middle way, particularly when more people than ever may be working from home, and may continue to do so (at least part time) when the pandemic is over.

Turning to other essential services such as energy and water supply and managing waste, we must ensure their provision is stable and robust. It is interesting to note that the consequence of COVID-19 on each of these sectors has exposed weaknesses but also opportunities. Renewables have emerged as a clean, sustainable energy source, boosting societies' resilience – for example, electricity systems with a high proportion of renewables have continued to operate effectively during the pandemic, as

foundation to rebuilding a strong economy. By embracing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all levels of government can ensure a robust approach is followed. Implementing SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) – is a key action area when rebuilding and building back better.

In cities, economic activity can be stimulated in a variety of ways: through technology and innovation, by promoting small and medium-sized enterprises, by encouraging decent employment, by championing fairness and inclusiveness, or by promoting sustainable tourism – to mention but a few action areas.

By linking re-growth and recovery to the SDGs – addressing poverty reduction, health and well-being, quality education, gender equality and responsible production and consumption – local and other tiers of government can push the reset button.

These goals are interconnected, and implementing them is a priority for all countries committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This brings us to the need for improved local policies and practices that address housing and sanitation, food, air quality, public spaces, sports and recreation facilities, health and medical facilities. The policies, processes and systems that plan, implement and monitor these, as well as the actual infrastructure, need to be more resilient – as the pandemic has shown.

Leadership

Many local governments' recovery plans are being oriented towards sustainable measures. For example, research from ICLEI shows that Budapest and many other cities introduced temporary bicycle lanes to support a safer and more sustainable way to travel during the pandemic – as fewer cars were on the road, the space was available.

In cities like Bristol and Zaragoza, free parking spaces were offered for healthcare workers. Barcelona has rolled out a number of initiatives to support the most vulnerable among its residents. These include home-delivered food hampers for elderly people and individuals with chronic illnesses, distributing electronic devices to enable vulnerable students to access online education, and the creation of support groups for individuals in need.

Opportunities for creativity and action abound. The link between humans and our ecosystems is strong, yet simultaneously fragile. The need for resilience is clear, but often not well understood and not well investigated.

By re-orienting recovery and resilience following the global COVID-19 pandemic, we have an opportunity to plan and implement measures that support sustainable development, tackle climate change and uplift the poor, marginalised and vulnerable – while at the same time allowing economies to recover.

What is the space in which to do this? We must engage in our fragile cities, and co-design and co-create a new future – as citizens, experts, service users and service providers, and as leaders. ●

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



Over **90%** of COVID-19 cases are in urban areas



Air pollution caused **4.2 million** premature deaths in 2016



Share of urban population living in slums rose to **24%** in 2018



Globally, significant progress was made in reducing slum dwelling during the period 2000 to 2014, reducing the proportion of urban population living in slums from 28 per cent to 23 per cent. That trend has been reversed, in recent years, rising to 24 per cent in 2018, over a billion people, due to increases in Northern Africa, Western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020



© Linh Pham/Getty Images

Interconnected goals

COVID-19 has shown the SDGs are a solution to, not a casualty of, the current crisis, but only if they are taken as an interconnected strategy for transformation

By **Enyseh Teimory**, Communications Officer, United Nations Association – UK (with case studies by UNA-UK staff)

We have heard time and again during the COVID-19 crisis that this pandemic has shone a light on the fault lines in our global system and laid bare the enduring inequalities that exist among and between our communities. COVID-19 knows no borders and the reality that our world is deeply interconnected has never been more evident. We have seen in the face of global crises, global solutions are needed more than ever.

At the heart of the 2030 Agenda is the notion that collective action can ensure that ‘no one is left behind’. COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus the state of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), agreed by world leaders just five years ago. There have been calls to ‘revise’ and ‘reset’ the SDGs, and it has been suggested that the targets set five years ago are outdated, incompatible with the political and economic state of our world today. But, as argued in the *Nature* article, ‘Speaking truth to power about the SDGs’, the targets are still affordable, and critics have not demonstrated any technical or

operational barriers. The SDGs still provide the framework for transformation. What is lacking is political commitment and accountability.

Holistic transformation

At their core, the SDGs seek to redress the fundamental imbalances of our global system, and in doing so ensure that quality of life and dignity for all is no longer a game of geographical chance. If this agenda is faltering, as recent reports indicate, it is because the same imbalances the SDGs seek to redress are undermining this collective process.



▲ Hanoi, Vietnam pictured in April, with the roads virtually free of traffic. Globally, in April, daily CO₂ emissions were down 17 per cent year-on-year

And this is just one way in which the sustainable development agenda is fundamentally interconnected. The devastating consequences of COVID-19 further demonstrate that holistic policies that harness this interconnectedness will be required to shape the architecture of a post-COVID recovery. This necessity was readily apparent even before COVID-19, and has been evidenced by research such as the 2017 report from the International Science Council, *A Guide to SDG Interactions: from Science to Implementation*. But, as our case studies show, the case is now even more clear.

The recent *Sustainable Development Report 2020* (SDR2020) highlights how far the pandemic has set the world back on its path to achieving the targets of the SDGs. Decades of positive action are at risk of being undone. For example, data indicates that poverty – the

Air quality: health (SDG 3) and climate (SDG 13)

By Ben Donaldson

Carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrogen oxides and other emissions fell by 10–30 per cent globally between February and June during the lockdown, and the health benefits were immediate.

During the first month of lockdown, a study from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air estimated that there were 11,000 fewer deaths in Europe as a result of reduced industrial and vehicular emissions. The study also showed 1.3 million fewer days of work absence, 6,000 fewer children developing asthma and 6,000 fewer preterm births in the same period.

According to the London Air Quality Network, reduced air pollution from road traffic led to a 55 per cent reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels in the UK's capital. And a survey by the British Lung Foundation found that one in six people with chronic lung conditions had experienced improvements in their lung health during lockdown. In children it was even higher (one in five), and for asthmatics it was one in four.

Other benefits are harder to quantify. Across previously smog-ridden cities, clear, blue skies prevailed. Residents of Jalandhar in Punjab could see the Dhauladhar mountain range for the first time in years. As road traffic evaporated, we breathed more freely. People turned to walking and biking to move safely through previously congested streets. Bike use boomed across the world, in many cases incentivised by improved infrastructure such as in Europe where, according to the European Cyclists' Federation, by July more than 2,000 km of new cycle lane and 2,700 individual infrastructural measures from almost

400 cities and communities had been announced. As well as benefits around fitness and reducing obesity, active travel replaces polluting journeys, in turn further improving air quality and incentivising yet more active travel.

Clearly a global lockdown is not the answer to environmental or health concerns. But the pandemic has shown that behaviours that are good for our planet are often also good for our health. Progress towards SDG 3 is accelerated by progress towards SDG 13 and vice versa.

Air pollution is also marked by environmental injustice. The worst air pollution is found in the most deprived neighbourhoods, where individuals are least likely to own a car. Reduced emissions and active transport will help relieve harm, which disproportionately affects marginalised groups, contributing to SDG 10 (reducing inequality).

Incentivising change

But the positive knock-on effects of lockdown could be short-lived. CO₂ levels and vehicle use have bounced back rapidly as restrictions have been lifted. Public transport is being shunned and, in many cases, temporary cycling incentives have dried up. Hard-and-fast action by governments and city authorities is essential to bank the improvements that have been glimpsed and to incentivise sustained behavioural change.

Stopping subsidies for fossil fuels, expanding green energy and redesigning cities to make it easier to make healthy choices will help us capitalise on the lessons of this pandemic and make essential progress towards the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement. ●

very first goal – is on the rise as a result of the pandemic and could increase by as much as 8 per cent, the first time in three decades that global poverty has increased.

It is not only the scale of our response that needs to change. Various reports have

highlighted that it is unhelpful to assume that the SDGs are a project dependent solely on financing. Instead Agenda 2030 is predicated on the fact that sustainability is built, not bought. More money is needed, but the ends to which it is used are as

important as the quantities in which it is available.

COVID-19 has made this clear, “notably in high-income countries that were thought best prepared to face epidemics”, in the words of SDR2020. This has been exemplified in the devastating figures from the United States, a country that spends nearly 20 per cent of its GDP on health has had one of the least effective and deadly responses to COVID-19.

As of writing October 2020, the US has had more than 8 million confirmed cases, and over 200,000 deaths. In comparison, South Korea, which spends around 8 per cent of GDP on health, has had approximately 25,000 cases and fewer than 500 deaths. The SDR2020 Pilot COVID-19 Index for OECD countries ranks South Korea number one, whereas the US ranks 28. Their reporting also shows South Korea on a positive trajectory

on more SDG targets. Clearly, a holistic societal transformation based around the SDGs is worth many hundreds of billions of dollars in additional spending.

Indeed, if progress towards the SDGs in the last five years had been on target, responses to contain and control the outbreak and its impacts could have been swifter and more effective. This is evidenced in part in the SDR2020's reporting that Asian countries have made the most progress in the last five years. It was those countries that have responded to COVID-19 most effectively.

By recognising the interrelatedness of the SDGs more cogently in policy and practice, there is the potential for action at local, national and international levels to better mobilise across sectors and develop integrated approaches to targets. Interconnectivity doesn't just transmit risk, it can create synergies: see Ben Donaldson's focus (page 43) on how the response to COVID-19 impacted rates of air pollution in London, and more widely the short-term climate relief that has been observed in different forms across the planet. National lockdowns caused great, if necessary, hardship but also demonstrated the viability of more sustainable methods of living and working, leading to observable changes to local environments.

The consequences of taking positive actions for our planet – and finding practical responses such as the kilometres of new cycle paths that have been created – reminds us that one of the primary benefits of the SDGs as an interconnected system of responses is the positive feedback loops that this creates.

The fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic thus far has demonstrated that the roadmap set out in 2015 is the best guide we have to not only realise a sustainable and equitable global future that protects people and planet, but also tackle and prevent crises of this very nature. As the latest SDG report notes, the SDGs can “frame long-term strategies towards more resilient and sustainable societies”. In doing so we will not only build back more sustainably, fairly and equitably, but with renewed momentum towards achieving these vital targets. ●

Brazil: health (SDG 3), biodiversity (SDG 15) and inequality (SDG 10)

By Lauren Muir

COVID-19 has struck the world at a time of widening inequalities, an accelerating climate crisis, and when the international community is worryingly short of achieving global development targets. The pandemic has exacerbated the very challenges that the SDGs seek to resolve. Healthcare and political systems are at breaking point and the focus on a ‘global partnership’ has taken a back seat as countries battle the virus. While this global crisis has impacted the lives of people in all corners of the world, the devastation has been far from equal, with already-fragile communities facing disproportionate catastrophe.

Brazil is the most biodiverse country in the world, hosting more than 17 per cent of the world's biological diversity and the greatest number of endemic species. Yet, the country is facing a climate catastrophe and persistent and deepening inequalities between its communities.

The year 2020 has produced continuous challenges for Brazil – fires, flash flooding, continuing deforestation, static economic growth, political uncertainty – all compounded by the effects of COVID-19. At the time of writing, Brazil has the third highest global case total, with over 150,000 recorded deaths. Within this context, indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by the virus. This disparity is in part a consequence of their remoteness,

there are few doctors and great distances to hospitals. Moreover, limited access to life-saving medical equipment means that even if the virus is identified, rates of survival are low.

Studies have shown that indigenous groups are at greater risk of contracting the disease and have lower survival rates. According to the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, there have been 30,000 cases and 785 deaths within 110 communities, whose populations total over 900,000. Limited testing means that numbers could be higher.

The pandemic's full impact on Amazonia will not be clear for some time. Brazil faces losing an entire generation of indigenous leaders to COVID-19 – losing knowledge not only about their communities and cultures, but about the biodiversity and natural landscape with which they are so entwined.

This reality demonstrates the interconnectedness of the SDGs. Poor health, climate change and disrupted biodiversity increase inequality and heighten the vulnerability of remote populations. COVID-19 has highlighted this chain reaction by showing that these communities are the most vulnerable to this effect. By realising the connectedness of these particular SDGs, more can be done to protect indigenous lives and their environments. When one area – health, climate, biodiversity or inequality – is neglected, it has a degrading impact on others, challenging the achievement of the SDGs. ●

Lebanon: health (SDG 3), food (SDG 2) and peace (SDG 16)

By Rianna Naye

Lebanon hosts the world's highest number of displaced persons per capita. With conflict in Syria now in its 10th year, it hosts an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees as well as more than 200,000 Palestinian refugees.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) describes the situation in Lebanon as one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time, now exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported 44,482 cases in Lebanon as of 5 October. The pandemic has thrown several interconnected issues into sharp relief, such as a lack of good governance and inclusive institutions, a weak economy and poor management of vital staples.

An integral link between SDG 2 and SDG 3 is money. Access to both food and healthcare is heavily affected by income. While this translates to serious consequences for the majority of Lebanon's population – 55 per cent of people in Lebanon qualify as poor, and extreme poverty is now at 28 per cent – the situation is even more severe for Lebanon's refugees and is exacerbated by weak institutions.

Overlapping crises

Analysis conducted by Oxfam in 2017 has found critical gaps in minimum wage and social protections, and entrenched discrimination against refugees. The resulting figures are staggering: the Norwegian Refugee Council found that 83 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon face extreme poverty, and in 2020 UNHCR reported that 92 per cent of displaced Syrians experience some level of food insecurity.

The World Food Programme, in Lebanon since 2011, now assists more than 800,000 severely vulnerable Syrian refugees. Additionally, UNHCR's 2019 vulnerability assessment for refugees in Lebanon found that cost was now the most significant barrier to healthcare access.



© UNHCR/Diego Ibarra Sánchez

The close relationships between these goals are perhaps most clearly illustrated by the explosion that occurred at the port in Beirut in August 2020. Nearly 200 people were killed and more than 6,000 injured in the explosion, which has been attributed to the unsafe storage of some 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate in a warehouse at Beirut's port. Experts in good governance have expressed alarm that the chemicals were stored so close to residential areas and the national wheat reserves for nearly seven years, but senior officials ignored warnings. Some 85 per cent of Lebanon's food is imported, coming through Beirut's port. The explosion destroyed 15,000 metric tonnes of wheat – exacerbating food insecurity. It also devastated Lebanon's healthcare system, which was already under significant strain. WHO reported six hospitals and 20 clinics were damaged in the blast.

Amid these overlapping crises and COVID-19 travel restrictions, UNHCR and UNICEF expressed "deep concern" at the spike in attempts by refugees to move

▲ Three-year-old Syrian refugee Yasmine Al Sham plays with her sisters at their home in Barja, Lebanon. Her family fled from East Ghouta in 2014. Their resettlement to Norway has been delayed by the pandemic

onwards to Cyprus. The seven-day journey is extremely dangerous: on 14 September, the UN Peacekeeping force in Lebanon UNIFIL's Maritime Task Force rescued a boat off the coast of Lebanon, where several passengers died during the journey.

While the deportation of refugees was suspended as Lebanon closed its borders to combat COVID-19, in his 21 September address to the UN General Assembly, Lebanon's President Aoun stressed that they cannot continue hosting so many. Due to overcrowding, social distancing is often practically impossible. Though UNHCR has made significant strides to respond to the pandemic, reporting that 82 per cent of refugees are informed of preventative measures against COVID-19, they stress that "the biggest challenge for refugees is simply to survive". ●

Gold mining's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals

In developing the Responsible Gold Mining Principles, the World Gold Council has set out an overarching ESG framework for the gold mining sector which underpins sustained social and economic development



Terry Heymann
Chief Financial Officer,
World Gold Council

It is sometimes easy to forget that gold plays a critically important role in many aspects of human society, and all of us have gold in some part of our lives. We rely on it every day in our electronic devices. We wear it as jewellery. It is present in medicines and testing kits. Indeed, gold is a unique metal that does not corrode or tarnish over time, meaning it has become intimately linked with legacy and inheritance in society, and why in many cultures around the world we give and receive gold as ceremonial gifts. And because it is a highly liquid, long-term store of value, gold has provided financial security for individuals and countries for millennia. In short, gold's value reflects its unique and ingrained role in society and in the global economy.

Gold is also a scarce natural resource. Mining companies have a responsibility to work together with governments and communities to extract gold in a way that creates sustainable benefits for the people of the countries where gold is found. To guide the industry, the World Gold Council (WGC), in collaboration with its member companies and after extensive consultation

with third-party stakeholders including governments, civil society and NGOs, launched the Responsible Gold Mining Principles (RGMPs) in September 2019.

The RGMPs are an ambitious set of 51 individual principles that cover all material aspects of environmental, social and governance (ESG) related to gold mining, including water management, climate change, gender diversity, anti-bribery and community engagement, to name just a few. These principles set very clear expectations for the entire industry as to what constitutes responsible gold mining.

To meet societal expectations for transparency and credibility, company performance against the RGMPs will be publicly disclosed and independently verified. Third-party oversight will set these principles apart from many others and provide confidence to the market that the product is responsibly sourced. Implementation and full conformance with the RGMPs is mandatory for WGC members, and we know that many investors expect that all responsible gold mining companies follow these principles.

Extensive consultation

During the development of the RGMPs, extensive consultation was conducted over a two-year period, during which considerable input was received and incorporated from a variety of stakeholder groups including civil society, supply chain participants and governments. The SDG targets were also reviewed and mapped to ensure meaningful alignment between the two sets of goals. By design therefore, implementing the RGMPs effectively means contributing to the realisation of the SDGs.

To help communicate some of these activities and gold mining's development potential, the WGC recently released a report entitled *Gold Mining's Contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals*. This reviews how leading gold companies contribute to the SDGs. Importantly, it also addresses how responsible miners



©Endeavour Mining

A haul truck driver, trained under Endeavour Mining's initiative to open up jobs that have not traditionally welcomed women



Left: children at a school in Mali, funded by Resolute Mining. Right: a worker on an anti-malaria initiative, a partnership between AngloGold Ashanti and the Ghanaian government

mitigate the negative social and environmental impacts of the industry, which if left unchecked could otherwise slow progress towards meeting the SDGs. The report also looks at key challenges for the industry, such as COVID-19, improving social and environmental practices in the artisanal mining sector and reducing the industry's impact on climate change.

The WGC report highlights almost 40 case studies, which are grouped under five themes: Global Partnerships (SDG 17), Social Inclusion (SDGs 5, 10, 16) Economic Development (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9) and Responsible Operations, Energy and the Environment (SDGs 6, 7, 12, 13, 15). We highlight how companies are tackling disease, showcasing, for instance, AngloGold Ashanti's partnership with the Ghanaian government in the fight against malaria. Their outreach programmes, together with improved community access to diagnostics and therapeutics through the mine's hospital facilities, resulted in the incidence of malaria being reduced by 74 per cent over three years and resulted in the methodologies of this programme being used to reduce malaria in other parts of the country

Effective partnerships

Building on strong partnerships, the gold mining industry is also working on improving social inclusion as set out by SDGs 5, 10 and

16. Historically, women and minority groups have been seriously under-represented and the industry is working on addressing these challenges and providing more inclusive working environments.

Endeavour Mining, for instance, focuses on helping women take on jobs that are traditionally seen as not welcoming to women, such as driving haul trucks (the evidence from mines in Chile is that they are better at it than their male colleagues). The report also highlights how companies help women in communities surrounding Kinross Gold's mine in Mauritania establish economic opportunities through small business training and funding of micro-projects.

Gold mining also supports economic development through the construction of schools, livelihoods programmes for communities, teaching farming and business skills, creating direct and indirect jobs and improving infrastructure. WGC members are doing incredible work to support local communities, from Golden Star Resources building 43 school classrooms and dormitories near its operation in Ghana to Resolute Mining investing in 20 micro-projects near its mine in Mali, which were selected by the local authorities to help improve integration with the local economy and ensure sustainability.

The report also looks at how responsible miners are protecting the environment, including water resources and contributing

to the transition to a low-carbon economy.

An example is Newmont's Borden mine, the first all-electric underground mine. Another is IAMGOLD's project, which provides potable water for over 100,000 people in Burkina Faso, a collaboration with both government and community leaders.

COVID-19 has made working in effective partnerships even more important, and WGC members were quick to respond to some of the immediate challenges created by the pandemic. As described in the report, leading gold miners have embarked on humanitarian initiatives and provided vital assistance to their host nations, ranging from making sizeable financial contributions to launching screening tests and offering mine-funded hospitals to enhance critical healthcare for local communities.

Opportunity and growth

Ultimately, if they are to be successful and be welcome neighbours, gold mining companies strive to work with their host communities to turn mineral wealth into a means of advancing human development. Gold mines bring opportunities and act as an engine of economic growth, especially in poorer, rural locations where there are often few alternative avenues for community advancement.

Looking ahead to 2030, there is much that needs to be done and COVID-19 has meant that achieving the SDGs will require even more of a concerted effort from government and businesses. The gold mining industry is well placed to further advance the SDGs and the leading gold mining companies are committed to doing their part in supporting their host governments and communities over the next decade and beyond. ■



UNA-UK thanks the World Gold Council for its generous support for this publication



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Lessons from the financial crisis

While global cooperation after the 2008 financial crisis avoided total economic meltdown, not all actions had the desired results. How can we build back better this time?



◀ Installing solar panels in Wuhan, China. Green stimulus formed an admittedly small part of the recovery plans for most major economies following the 2008–2009 recession. There was a boost for clean energy among Asian economies

As such, it is not enough to simply build back from COVID-19. We must build back better, as well as greener. We need to do so in an inclusive, sustainable and resilient manner with the SDGs underpinning every step of this recovery.

I am of the view that the global financial crisis of 2008 can offer some important lessons in this regard. There are a variety of parallels to both of these global crises. Now, as then, uncertainty and volatility are the defining characteristics of the day.

GDPs have fallen. Unemployment has surged. Housing crises are being exacerbated. And food insecurity is growing exponentially, with the World Food Programme sounding the alarm that 270 million people will face food insecurity by the end of 2020. This ‘hunger pandemic’ may seriously undermine global progress on achieving both SDG 2 and the Zero Hunger Challenge initiative launched during the Rio Summit in 2012.

Both COVID-19 and the 2008 financial crisis also exemplify the interconnected nature of our globalised world. They demonstrate that global solutions are needed to persevere over the inherently global challenges that we face.

The financial crisis represented a true test during my first term as Secretary-General. At the international level, the financial crisis dangerously conjoined alongside the existing food and energy crises to form a triple global crisis.

The key actions in 2008 and 2009 that proved to be the difference between financial recovery and further collapse centred on strong global leadership and multilateral cooperation.

As global markets imploded, there was a robust international response to prevent further freefall and reinvigorate the world economy. The G20 Leaders’ Summit was established in response. Decisive action by heads of state of the world’s largest

By **Ban Ki-moon**, former UN Secretary-General

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended our interconnected world, magnified existing inequalities and widened socio-economic divisions. This has the potential to stall, or even reverse, global progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with just 10 years left until their 2030 target date.

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economies, alongside the UN, was critical in paving the path towards recovery.

Timely top-level international cooperation played a decisive role in preventing further disaster. Countries largely heeded my calls to resist protectionism, not turn away from existing development commitments, and invest in resilience-building to combat the fragility of the most vulnerable.

This included the 2009 launch of the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to bring key stakeholders together in partnership and monitor international engagement with conflict-affected and fragile states.

Coordinated response

During the COVID-19 crisis, however, we are lacking this type of cooperation and decisive global leadership. Countries are carrying out their own piecemeal approaches with varying degrees of success. Great power conflict is growing. Division and mistrust are sadly flourishing at a time when a coordinated international response is greatly needed.

In this regard, it is critical to recommit to multilateralism and international cooperation to simultaneously guide our recoveries from COVID-19 and fortify the resilience of our economies, societies and planet for the next major crisis that is certain to arise. This could be a future pandemic, cascading climate tipping points, or a major regional or global armed conflict.

To build back better, first we need to ensure that we protect the most vulnerable.

I am proud that in 2008 and 2009 we placed a special focus on scaling up timely protection for those most at risk. This included my 2008 appeal to the G20 leaders for \$1 trillion in financing packages earmarked for developing countries.

Countries must come together in a similar spirit today, as COVID-19 and its secondary economic and societal aftershocks will hit the most vulnerable particularly hard.

Beyond hindering efforts to achieve SDG 2 (zero hunger), vulnerable populations in both developing and developed states are being especially affected in the spheres of

poverty (SDG 1), health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8) and inequality (SDG 10), among others.

Second, we must increase investment in public health resilience and global health security. This will also go a long way in combating growing inequality and enhancing social inclusion.

Austerity measures have only deepened inequality since the global financial crisis, and those that were left behind then have been hit especially hard by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Policymakers must invest in people, rather than banks, this time.

The bottom line is that our recovery from this pandemic must guide us to a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient future

To do so, it is essential to holistically integrate public health preparedness, universal health coverage, and healthy societies in a three-pronged approach to build back better. Policymakers must also scale up investment in public health services to help avoid and combat future pandemics. Protecting and bettering the health of all people everywhere should not be left solely to the health sector. Rather, this should become an all-government, all-hands-on-deck strategy led by heads of state and government.

Aligning COVID-19 recoveries to the SDGs is incredibly important in this connection. The approaches and indicators developed for SDG 3 (good health and well-being) can serve as a roadmap to do so.

Third, we should ensure that our COVID-19 recovery simultaneously tackles climate change and provides pathways to a more sustainable and resilient planet.

At the high-level segment of the UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan in 2008, I advocated for a 'Green New Deal' that would benefit all nations at all income

levels as a driving strategy to rebuild better from the financial crisis. More than 12 years later, as the international community is struggling to cope with the combination of COVID-19 and the accelerating climate crisis, it is imperative to reiterate this appeal to policymakers.

Indeed, by the end of 2020 unemployment could surge to 10 per cent in OECD countries, or even as high as 12 per cent if a second wave of COVID-19 spreads, with no jobs recovery coming until after 2021. In vulnerable and conflict-affected countries, the employment situation will be much worse.

As temperatures increase, sea levels rise, wildfires burn and historic numbers remain unemployed, providing green jobs in the renewable energy sector with a view towards decarbonising our economies and restricting global temperatures to 1.5°C is needed now more than ever. But climate change adaptation is equally important in a holistic response. The Global Commission on Adaptation, where I currently serve as Co-Chair, estimates that investing \$1.8 trillion globally in five key climate-resilience areas could release \$7.1 trillion worth of benefits from today until 2030.

Road to recovery

The bottom line is that our recovery from this pandemic must guide us to a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient future.

It must be more inclusive to ensure that no one is left behind, including marginalised communities and the most vulnerable. It must be more sustainable so we can build our economies and societies back greener and simultaneously combat worrying air quality levels, biodiversity loss, CO₂ emissions, extreme temperatures and ecosystem damage. And it must be more resilient to give humanity and our planet the right tools to confront the next major pandemic, environmental calamity or security crisis.

As in 2008, international cooperation, partnership and global governance – including the strong leadership of the UN – is needed to underpin our recovery from COVID-19 and build back better, with the SDGs guiding our dynamic response each step of the way. ●

From crisis to catalyst for transformation

The UN projects 265 million people face severe food insecurity due to COVID-19. Through Action Africa, 250,000 farmers can now provide food for one million people in East Africa, while millions more are connecting to ongoing advice through Yara's groundbreaking new digital platform

"My main aim as a farmer is to never lack food in my household." Anastasia Were Kulundu works full-time in Kakamega, Kenya, where she farms maize, cassava, groundnuts and bananas to feed her parents and two grown children and provide a small income for her children's education.

Anastasia is at the Yara retailer to receive her share of the 40,000 tons of premium fertiliser Yara has donated in an effort to triple the region's maize production this year. "Many farmers were late to plant because of the complications of COVID-19," she says. "The next seasons will be good, thanking God, because of this donation."

The retailer confirms Anastasia's farm size and crop mix to ensure she's eligible for the donation, then scans the QR codes on her three bags of fertiliser into Yara's digital platform, the first of its kind to secure traceability from port to farm in East Africa.

As one of two million farmers in Kenya and Tanzania to register with the platform, Anastasia now has a channel for accessing new resources for a more secure food future.

Yara's digital platform enables the first-ever traceable supply chain across East Africa



Anastasia Were Kulundu, in Kakamega, Kenya, has access to digital connections to establish enduring food security

Enabling - and sustaining - food security

The current crisis requires urgent action to prevent permanent social and economic damage. It is also a catalyst for transformational change that can create a more resilient food system for millions of people.

Yara's Action Africa: Thriving Farms, Thriving Future initiative has seen monumental success in bridging the connectivity divide for the first time ever in these African communities. In just 12 weeks, a team of 50 developers across three continents developed a digital platform to track the fertiliser distribution, and to offer farmers like Anastasia, half of whom are women, a first-of-its-kind resource for agronomic advice throughout the growing season.

The fertiliser donation is the first of many opportunities to reach these farmers, who could gain access to financial, insurance, market and infrastructure support when additional partners join Yara's platform.

Partnerships are key to reaching Action Africa's potential

Robust partnerships can offer a range of critical resources in agriculture and beyond,

to positively impact millions of lives as communities establish foundational and enduring stability. For Anastasia, Action Africa can help her create the future she envisions for her family. "I've done a lot to improve," she says, "And I desire to do more." ■

Action Africa: Thriving Farms, Thriving Future needs your collaboration to create a thriving future for all farmers in Africa and beyond.

Please contact Øystein Botillen, Yara Stakeholder Relations and Business Development Manager, +4745217167, oystein.botillen@yara.com

UNA-UK thanks Yara for its generous support for this publication



Knowledge grows

The global vaccine effort

None of us will be safe from coronavirus until all people – not just those in rich countries – can access safe and effective vaccines. As with the work needed to achieve the SDGs, tackling COVID-19 demands nothing less than an urgent and genuinely multilateral effort involving all nations

By **Scott F. Dowell**, Deputy Director, Vaccine Development and Surveillance, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in an inspiring new era in humanity's age-old struggle to fight epidemics. Just consider the contrast between the speed of COVID-19 product development and the pace for past outbreaks.

Nearly four decades ago, in June 1981, researchers in the United States reported that a group of young and previously healthy men living in Los Angeles were suffering from a persistent form of pneumonia that was difficult to treat. Two of the men had died, and doctors suspected the patients were suffering from a virus that was destroying their immune systems.

It took researchers another two years to identify the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and connect it to the condition that we now know as AIDS. It wasn't until 1985 that a reliable antibody test was developed to confirm HIV infection.

In 1994 – 13 years after the first reported AIDS cases – the first safe and effective treatments for HIV were approved. But it wouldn't be until 2001 that global partners, under the leadership of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, would start extending affordable access to these treatments to the tens of millions of people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. By then some 1.6 million people a year were dying of AIDS.

Now consider the timeline for the COVID-19 response. In late December 2019, doctors in Wuhan, China reported a sudden surge in serious cases of viral pneumonia caused by an unknown pathogen.

By 9 January 2020, Chinese authorities and the World Health Organization had announced the discovery of a novel coronavirus, the virus we now call SARS-CoV-2. Over the weekend of 11 and 12 January, Chinese authorities shared the full sequence of the coronavirus genome with scientists around the world.

Within days the first vaccine candidates against SARS-CoV-2 were put forward, and in March – a little more than two months after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic – the first people were enrolled in clinical trials to assess the safety and immunogenicity (ability to provoke an immune response) of vaccines against the virus.

If several of these vaccine candidates prove successful – and clear the remaining hurdles of efficacy demonstration, regulatory approval, scaled manufacture, financing, and vaccine distribution – we will be able to end the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 by ensuring the equitable distribution of vaccines to everyone who needs them, everywhere around the world.

Essentially, we could accomplish in just a year or two what it has taken the world 40 years to achieve regarding AIDS.

Major advances

These viruses – HIV and SARS-CoV-2 – and the circumstances surrounding them are different. But, clearly, much progress has been made. There have been major advances in research and development. We now have powerful tools that allow scientists to sequence entire genomes in a matter of hours, identify key sequences of genetic code, and then make them into candidate vaccines in a matter of days.

Research innovations by themselves, however, will not be enough to tackle COVID-19. Governments, businesses, multilateral institutions and other partners must work together to share resources, build on their relative strengths and expertise, and make sure that new diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines can benefit every person on the planet. This approach is not only more equitable, it also is more effective. With COVID-19, the reality is that no one is safe until everyone is safe. New modelling from Northeastern University in the United States helps to illustrate why.

Ensuring equity for all

Data scientists there recently analysed two scenarios. In the first, vaccines are distributed equitably according to countries' populations. In the other, which approximates what we're currently seeing as countries lock in future supply, the world's 50 highest-income countries get the first two billion doses of vaccine.

In the second scenario, the virus continues to spread unchecked for four months in three quarters of the world and almost twice as many people die. Moreover, the risk of reintroductions of COVID-19 in the world's wealthiest countries remains high, putting populations in Europe, North America and East Asia at continued risk.

That's why a multilateral approach to global health is so essential. The Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator – known as the ACT-Accelerator – is a partnership launched at the end of April 2020 that brings together governments, scientists, businesses, civil society, philanthropists and global health organisations. Its goal is to move the world out of the current crisis phase of the



© Nicolas Asfour/AFP via Getty Images

▲ Researchers at a Sinovac Biotech laboratory in Beijing, conducting clinical trials on one of the several potential vaccines being developed in China

pandemic by supporting the development and equitable distribution of the tests, treatments and vaccines the world needs to reduce mortality and severe illness.

Since its launch, we have seen growing support from governments around the world for the ACT-Accelerator. G20 health and finance ministers recently endorsed it and encouraged further financial support from G20 member states. Three organisations leading the charge to develop and distribute vaccines globally – the World Health Organization, Gavi and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations – announced in September that 64 high and upper-middle-income countries had agreed to join the COVAX Facility – the vaccine arm of the ACT-Accelerator. To date, ACT-Accelerator members have raised nearly \$3 billion – a critical down payment on the estimated additional \$38 billion that will ultimately be needed.

When Bill and Melinda Gates created their foundation two decades ago,

they committed themselves to the goal of ensuring that every child has the opportunity to lead a healthy and productive life. COVID-19 has made that goal more challenging. But it has also clarified what we must do, as a global community, to ensure equity for all.

It starts with global partnerships and recognising that we can accelerate progress by working together. Progress is possible, but it is not inevitable, and nothing has demonstrated that principle more than the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since 1990, we have become used to statistics that demonstrate steady progress in all key indicators of global health, with fewer children dying before their fifth birthday, fewer mothers dying in childbirth, fewer families struggling to put food on the table, and more girls going to school.

But three decades of steady progress have suddenly ground to a halt, and the world faces major reversals if we do not commit to working together with unprecedented

urgency and an earnest commitment to multilateral collaboration.

Last month, the Gates Foundation released its annual *Goalkeepers* report, which tracks 18 indicators included in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. It shows that already in 2020, the pandemic has pushed nearly 40 million people back into extreme poverty. Child immunisation rates – which had reached 84 per cent globally – have returned to 1990s levels. And COVID-19 is rapidly eliminating hard-won gains in social and economic equity, deepening divisions of race, geography, gender and wealth.

So the most important question we face is how to renew progress and get the world back on track. The answer must start with focusing on what we can do – together – to end this once-in-a-century pandemic. ●



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The future we want, the UN we need

People have called for a greener, fairer and more inclusive future for the UN's 75th anniversary, marked, as it was, by unprecedented challenges – we must respond



◀ A volunteer gathers UN75 survey responses in rural Zambia, part of the global conversation that has surveyed over a million people

that the security and welfare of their citizens were better secured through cooperation and compromise than rivalry and war.

Unprecedented global pain and suffering led to this realisation. What will it take today? A global health emergency that has reversed hard-won development gains, achieved over decades, in a matter of months? The existential risks of climate change and nuclear weapons? Seismic shifts in demography and the digital sphere? Rising geopolitical tensions? Deepening inequalities? Widespread discontent?

Even before COVID-19 turned our lives upside down, the UN did not want its 75th anniversary to be treated as a celebration. Instead, our Secretary-General, António Guterres, saw this as an opportunity to listen to the people we serve, to understand their hopes and fears for the future and their expectations for international cooperation – and for the UN in particular.

The world's largest conversation

In January 2020, we launched UN75: a global conversation on how to close the gap between the future we want, set out in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and where we are headed if current trends continue. Building on the MY World survey conducted ahead of the SDGs' adoption, our vision was to spark discussions in all settings – from classrooms to boardrooms, parliaments to village halls – to increase trust and action within communities and across borders, sectors and generations.

The pandemic has made that work more challenging – but also more urgent. It has exposed the fragility not only of our health systems, but of all our structures. At the same time, it has underscored how interconnected we are, and how crucial it is for us to work together.

UN75 engaged people across the world in re-imagining our future, and gave them an opportunity to shape our response

to COVID-19. We are at a tipping point – political, social, economic and environmental – and it is vital that people, particularly the young and marginalised, have a voice as decisions are taken that will have lasting consequences for humanity.

To date, over a million people, from all countries and walks of life, have shared their views by taking our survey – online, or via SMS, telephone and local outreach. Tens of thousands have taken part in more involved conversations: 'UN75 dialogues' – virtual and in communities, where possible. We also worked with Edelman Intelligence and the Pew Research Center to poll 50,000 people in 50 countries, to ensure we had responses from a representative sample of the global population and not just those inclined to engage with us.

In addition, we analysed print, broadcast, online and social media in 70 countries to get a sense of discussions outside the UN75 initiative. And we mapped academic and policy research to provide expert perspectives on global challenges.

Together, these different strands represent the UN's most ambitious effort to crowdsource priorities and solutions, providing unique insights into the future we want, and the UN we need, at this time of deep challenge and anxiety.

What the world wants

In a world that feels increasingly polarised, perhaps the most striking finding to emerge is how much we have in common. Amidst the current crisis, the immediate priority for most people, whether in rich or developing countries, is access to basic services: healthcare, education, and safe water and sanitation. They also want to see more international solidarity and support given to those hardest hit: from tackling poverty and inequalities to boosting employment.

Looking to the future, their overwhelming concern is our inability to stem the climate crisis and destruction of our natural environment. They also want action to protect human rights, address conflict and reduce corruption.

Across all ages, regions and social groups, there is overwhelming support for global cooperation – not merely as something that

By **Natalie Samarasinghe**, Chief of Strategy, Office of the Special Adviser on the UN's 75th Anniversary

Seventy-five years ago, world leaders did something extraordinary: they created the United Nations. Born from the ashes of war, the UN is often romanticised as a product of global idealism – representing the hopes of war-weary populations for a better future. But it was equally, if not more so, a hard-nosed response by wartime leaders who recognised

is desirable or important, but as essential to overcoming the challenges we face.

And people are thinking big. In our dialogues, participants called for the global economy to be transformed. They discussed universal health coverage, universal basic income and affordable access to technology. They called for fossil fuel subsidies to end, for lethal autonomous weapons to be banned. They issued a clear demand for greater inclusion of civil society and youth in decision-making at all levels, including at the UN.

Turning point

While we rightly celebrate the gains we have made over the past 75 years – from decolonisation to the eradication of smallpox and improvements in living standards – too many have been left behind. Too many of us contend with violence, discrimination and deprivation on a daily basis. Too many have seen their fortunes worsen, as others have profited.

The SDGs were off track before the pandemic. One in three people did not have access to safe drinking water. Over half the global population lacked access to adequate sanitation services. Not a single biodiversity target, adopted to great fanfare a decade ago, has been achieved. This is particularly concerning given that 60 per cent of all known diseases, and 75 per cent of new infectious diseases pass from animals to humans.

Now, we are seeing the first rise in global poverty in over two decades, and the first drop in human development – life expectancy, health and education – since 1990. Global hunger is increasing. In South America, 17.1 million people are severely food insecure, compared with 4.5 million just seven months ago.

This must be our turning point. Our aspiration cannot be to return to how things were before, with large swathes of the human family stymied by a system that has never worked for them. We must build forward, not back. We must build on people's hopes and needs, and build up those most in need.

The pandemic has shown that huge transformations are possible, and vast sums of money can be deployed quickly, when

political will is aligned with public support. We can turn this crisis into an opportunity by taking decisions now that put us on a path to a safer, fairer and more sustainable future.

Making UN75 count

The good news is that path exists. The SDGs are designed to address the fragilities that this pandemic has exposed. What we need now is increased ambition to deliver them.

The Secretary-General has called on countries to adopt a new social contract that prioritises the needs of the most vulnerable, promotes green jobs and sustainable growth, and makes bailouts of industries such as aviation and shipping conditional on aligning with these goals. At the international level, he has called for a new global deal that delivers on global public goods and puts people and planet above profit. And he has called

for multilateral institutions, including the UN, to become more networked – linking institutions across sectors and geographies – and more inclusive, drawing on the capacities of civil society, youth, business, philanthropy, regions and cities, and academic and scientific institutions. This will require the same combination of vision and pragmatism that inspired the UN's founding 75 years ago. In recent times, this has seemed in short supply. But on 21 September, the UN's Member States adopted a declaration for the anniversary that commits them to responding to the global consultation conducted this year, and tasks the Secretary-General with recommending next steps.

This year is unlikely to be remembered for being the UN's 75th anniversary. But 2020 could still become the year we turned things around, if we stand together and act now. ●

Strong public support among advanced economies for international cooperation and multilateral governance

Median % who say ...

Coronavirus and global cooperation

If our country had cooperated more with other countries, the number of coronavirus cases would have been lower in this country

59%

No amount of cooperation would have reduced the number of coronavirus cases in this country

36%

Compromise on international issues

Our country should take into account the interests of other countries even if it means making compromises with them

58%

Our country should follow its own interests even when other countries strongly disagree

40%

Support for global community *

Countries around the world should act as part of a global community that works together to solve problems

81%

Countries around the world should act as independent nations that compete with other countries and pursue their own interests

17%

In summer 2020, nationally representative surveys were conducted in 14 advanced economies: the US, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the UK, Australia, Japan and South Korea. Due to COVID-19, the surveys were by phone and countries were selected where that was feasible.

* 2019 data. Belgium and Denmark not surveyed in 2019 and not included in this median.

Source: Pew Research Center



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Fighting COVID misinformation

From fears over 5G to false claims of miracle cures, coronavirus myths have too often spread faster than the virus itself. Governments and platforms must take tougher action to tackle this 'other' threat to public health

By **Karen Kornbluh**, Director, Digital Innovation and Democracy Initiative, The German Marshall Fund

In July, a video entitled 'America's frontline doctors' was a runaway train racing across the major digital platforms. The video – hosted on 'opinion' site Breitbart's Facebook page and spread by notorious influencers and conspiracy groups

– claimed that face masks are dangerous, social distancing is unnecessary, and the drug hydroxychloroquine is a miracle cure for COVID-19. It racked up 20 million views in just 12 hours on Facebook alone, before it was ultimately removed by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for violating their guidelines.

A report by the campaigning network Avaaz reveals that global health

misinformation has generated a staggering 3.8 billion views on Facebook in the past year. But the misinformation emanates from a relatively small number of high-

▲ A QAnon supporter at an anti-lockdown rally in Trafalgar Square, London, UK. QAnon, a far-right conspiracy theory that originates in the US and idolises President Trump, has spread online around the world

traffic websites that pose as news outlets. The top 10 of these disinformation outlets garnered a staggering four times more views than content from the websites of 10 leading health institutions including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). During a severe global pandemic, this rapid dissemination of health misinformation is utterly unacceptable.

One of the United Nations' most important Sustainable Development Goals is SDG 3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages). But the ease with which public health misinformation spreads across digital platforms directly challenges our ability to promote well-being.

Digital superspreaders

Online misinformation has made it more difficult for healthcare professionals to provide meaningful counsel to patients. According to a recent study published by the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, from January to March (when the disease and related disinformation had spread to a fraction of the population they have now), around the world approximately 800 people had died from COVID-19 and 5,876 had been hospitalised as a result of a conspiracy that highly concentrated alcohol could kill the virus, while 60 people had developed complete blindness after drinking methanol as a cure for COVID-19.

The major social media platforms have announced efforts to cut down on this misinformation. In March, Facebook applied warning labels to 40 million posts related to COVID-19. YouTube also removed and demonetised a significant amount of content early in the pandemic. These firms are also working to amplify trustworthy information by steering users to information produced by authoritative sources like the CDC and WHO.

But, as the data underscores, content can spread across the web before fact-checkers have sharpened their pencils. Much like the disease itself, stories that appear on misinforming sites are disseminated by what Avaaz calls superspreaders: pages, groups, channels and influencers with enormous

followings. The stories are then 'aerosolised' by algorithms that spread them across the web. By the time platforms take action to moderate content, often the misinformation has already gone viral.

Misinformation sites proliferate online, posing as news outlets while repeatedly publishing false content. They present misinformation as opinion to evade fact-checking, paste false headlines on factual stories, or disguise stories' ownership. Our analysis, using ratings from NewsGuard, a media-monitoring agency, and data from NewsWhip, a media intelligence firm, finds that content producers that repeatedly publish false content or are deceptive

vetted and verified using Associated Press and Society of Professional Journalists journalism standards". In reality, many of Mercola's health claims have been explicitly debunked by fact-checkers.

Some of these sites build their audiences by paying platforms to promote them. Dangerous content from these sites is then picked up by other pages, groups, YouTube channels and influencers with large audiences – the superspreaders. Journalist Judd Legum has shown, for example, how Mad World News' five large Facebook pages spread content from American conservative news and opinion website, The Daily Wire.

Misinformation does not stop at national borders. Any meaningful programme to address the spread of public health misinformation must rely on national laws, but should be coordinated and monitored internationally

in their presentation of content have increased interactions on Facebook in the US threefold since the second quarter of 2017. This growth rivals that of the most reputable sites.

A subset of misinformation sites is dedicated to health. Several of them are thriving on Facebook. Avaaz found that sites like REALFarmacy.com (581 million estimated views on Facebook in the last year) and GreenMedInfo.com (39 million) continue to publish COVID-19 misinformation to Facebook. This is despite Facebook's terms of service stating that the platform will unpublish the pages of repeat offenders when each page "surpasses a certain threshold of strikes".

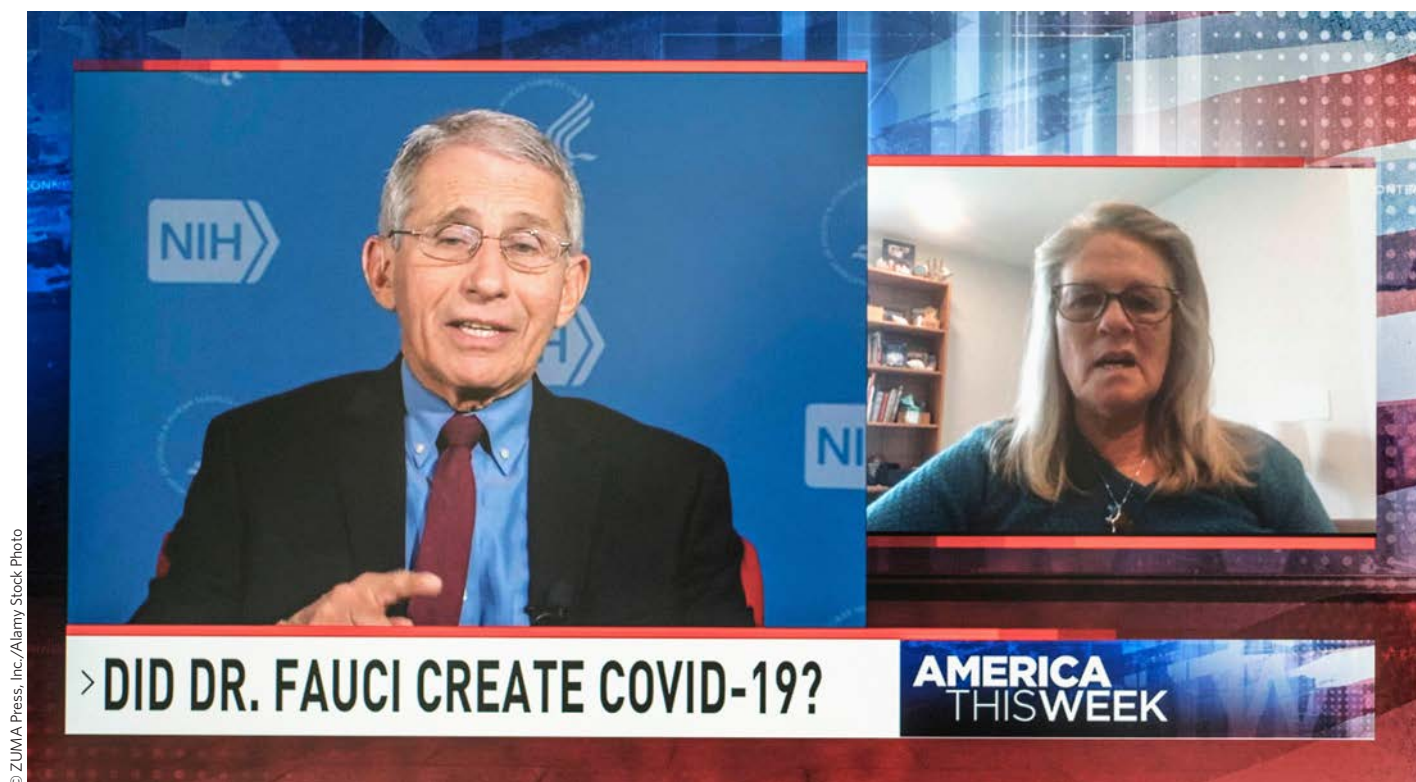
The stories that emanate from these sites are designed to suggest they were reported by a trusted news entity, or that they provide the reader with purported 'inside' information that some outrageous claim is true. The pages affiliated with Joseph Mercola, one of the leading purveyors of COVID-19 disinformation cited in the Avaaz report, erroneously claim that "all Mercola articles are fact-checked,

As the disinformation picks up speed, it becomes airborne due to way the platforms' algorithms sense content that will keep people online, sharing and liking – which salacious and outrageous content is more likely to do. This content is then automatically placed in recommendations or newsfeeds as if it had been recommended by friends or were breaking news.

Infrastructure of conspiracy

This infrastructure of conspiracy-spreading – stories posted by disinformation sites, spread by networks of pages, channels, influencers and groups, and then pushed aloft by algorithms of outrage – generates revenue for participants and platforms all along the way. The platforms place unrelated ads next to the conspiracy content, often sharing revenue with the carriers of the disinformation. Many of the site owners and account managers hawk often fraudulent health products and get-rich-quick schemes.

Instead of quarantining the disinformation sites and making sure that the superspreaders remain socially distant and hard to find, too often the platforms



© ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy Stock Photo

▲ A screen grab of a programme promoting the “Plandemic” conspiracy theory. The programme was shown on the Sinclair Broadcasting Group’s networks, nearly 300 TV stations across the US

fail to apply their standards consistently. And when they do isolate an individual conspiracy story, it is often only after it has gone airborne. The damage to public health has already been done.

Governments, platforms and public health experts must come together to change incentives for all participants in the infrastructure of conspiracy – turning it into an infrastructure of health promotion.

First, both governments and platforms can help inoculate us all against disinformation by funding and promoting to users a credible independent online platform – a BBC or PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) of the internet: providing public-interest journalism, public health information from authoritative sources, fact-checking and media literacy operations. This can be supported by taxing advertising revenue to restore some of the funds diverted from mainstream journalism while raising the cost of a business model that relies on data collection and the viral spread of disinformation.

Second, platforms must isolate the disinformation websites that pose as news

outlets by committing to limit the reach of those websites.

Third, the groups, influencers and channels that boost misinformation should lose their ability to do so if they coordinate in a way that is intended to deceive users.

Fourth, platforms must stop the algorithmic airborne spread of disinformation. Platforms must pause the spread of viral content until they can determine whether it has the potential to do harm once it spreads further, and whether it complies with public laws. Additional changes to algorithms should privilege truth over conspiracy.

Finally, to crack down on the fraud and manipulation that drives this infrastructure, we need radical transparency. Platforms should require that adverts, pages, channels, influencers and groups provide additional transparency about who funds them. Platforms should also disclose the ways in which content is algorithmically curated and moderated. Governments should update and improve enforcement of consumer protection laws, which have failed to keep up with technological developments.

Misinformation does not stop at national borders. Any meaningful programme to address the spread of public health misinformation must rely on national laws, but should be coordinated and monitored internationally.

Initiatives like the G7’s Charter on a Free, Open, and Safe Internet, the Christchurch Call to Action, the UN Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate’s Tech Against Terrorism partnership, and NATO StratCom are developing best practices, sharing information and coordinating responses against the spread of harmful content online, especially violent extremism and foreign election interference. It is essential to build on these initiatives to address online public health misinformation – and other dangerous conspiracy theories – to meaningfully achieve the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. ●



© Pedro Vilela/Getty Images

Data sharing to fight COVID-19

As the pandemic shows, governments cannot effectively tackle big problems without good data. But it also shows that we must vastly improve how we gather, share and act on data



◀ Members of the Pataxo HaHaHãe ethnic group, living on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, Brazil. They are part of a group of indigenous people displaced by the Vale dam disaster in 2019. Brazil is among the countries due to hold a census in 2020 who have postponed due to the pandemic

information is built on data systems that create a comprehensive picture of whole societies, and that are based on trust between people and governments.

But when it comes to timely and accurate data to fight COVID-19, and the social upheavals it brings in its wake, every country has been found wanting. For example, snapshots indicate that lockdowns have led to a surge in domestic violence worldwide, as women and children are trapped with their abusers. But there is almost no data to show the prevalence of domestic violence during lockdowns. In any case, few countries regularly track and share domestic violence figures, so trends will be hard to analyse.

Where data is poor, policy fails. Governments cannot tackle problems that they cannot see.

misinformation, spreading lies that harm people, families and communities. Getting the numbers right, and getting them out there, has never been more important.

Reliable, timely data can help overcome COVID-19

For too long, data has been the poor relation of public policy infrastructure, with vital investments in people, technology and skills lagging behind what is needed. But now people all over the world are learning that data, and the policy decisions based on it, can save your life and that of your loved ones, and that there can be no effective response to COVID-19 without good data.

The deficiencies laid bare by COVID-19 have pointed the way to better systems. There are four priorities we must achieve if we are to have the data we all need.

1. Every birth and death recorded quickly and electronically

Knowing about deaths is the most basic data needed for a global pandemic. Given the huge resources that have been poured into health programmes around the world over

When it comes to timely and accurate data to fight COVID-19, and the social upheavals it brings in its wake, every country has been found wanting... Where data is poor, policy fails. Governments cannot tackle problems that they cannot see

A public hungry for information

It is not just governments that need information. 'What Worries the World', a monthly Ipsos survey of 27 countries, found that COVID-19 has been the primary preoccupation for individuals, societies and governments throughout 2020. COVID concerns have remained higher than concerns about unemployment, despite International Labour Organization predictions of a 14 per cent reduction in employment worldwide.

People are hungry for reliable facts they can use to make personal decisions. Yet the pandemic has also created an epidemic of

many years, it should be a matter of global shame that the causes of more than half of all deaths in the world still go unrecorded each year. A good place to start would be investing in low-income countries, none of which have good-quality death registration systems, according to the World Health Organization.

In Africa, only eight countries register more than 75 per cent of deaths. Some nations, including Rwanda, Senegal and Ethiopia, are now setting up programmes to monitor graveyards and interview community leaders to try to detect spikes in burials.

By **Claire Melamed**, CEO, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

Governments have worryingly few tools in their toolkit to fight COVID-19. With a vaccine still months if not years away, the best defence is good information to make effective policy and sound individual choices. Good

Donors could make a start by putting a percentage of their health spend into supporting the national systems that consistently and reliably produce the data that underpins all policy and programming for global health, both in normal times and to tackle a pandemic.

2. No more lip service on data protection and privacy

Contact tracing is a critical tool for governments trying to curb the spread of disease, but it relies on people being prepared to share their most personal information. The failures of contact tracing have revealed how lack of trust can prevent vital data being shared.

In the US, awash with technology companies and with 98 per cent of people having access to phones in cities, one might expect contact tracing to be fairly straightforward. Yet efforts have been hampered by mistrust between federal and state government, while US citizens' trust in government is at an all-time low. MIT Technology Review rated every country with a contact-tracing app and found that some smaller countries like Ireland, Czech Republic and North Macedonia performed better than their larger counterparts on measures like transparency and not overstepping on data collection.

The broad discussion about contact-tracing apps and systems, how they are built, and the implications for personal privacy, suddenly makes data privacy everyone's business. This will not be the last pandemic most of us see in our lifetimes, and so data campaigners need to apply pressure on governments and multilateral organisations to rise to the challenge and accelerate progress towards new rules to protect us all.

3. More inclusive data on vulnerable groups

One of the most frustrating things for the data community is that careful plans for a huge round of censuses in 2020 were obliterated by the pandemic. The census is a source of essential information for public policymaking, especially when it comes to improving outcomes for indigenous and

ethnic groups, those with disabilities and other groups that are often overlooked. Our Inclusive Data Charter champions advocate for closing these data gaps, bringing real change in how data is collected.

In Colombia, DANE (the National Administrative Department of Statistics) now takes into account gender, life cycle, ethnicity and disability when producing statistics to create a more complete understanding of people's needs. This data puts countries in a much better position to understand which groups are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and address the systemic pressure driving those trends.

4. Systems not silos

In a world where data is being used to decide which borders to open, which countries people can visit without being quarantined,

developed or strengthened partnerships in 21 countries.

One example is Sierra Leone, which needed more detailed and timely data on at-risk populations across the country. The Government of Sierra Leone's National COVID-19 Emergency Operations Centre is collaborating with a coalition of international partners including GRID3, Esri, Maxar Technologies, Fraym, the Global Partnership and UNECA. Together, they are working to produce crucial geospatial datasets, analyses and tools under an open, non-commercial licence to support Sierra Leone's COVID-19 response.

The partnership is producing the most granular geospatial data in Sierra Leone's history, with rapid population estimates that predict how many people, as well as their age and sex, live within any given hectare area across the country. This data can help

Stronger data systems, protocols and standards for sharing data across borders are a critical ingredient in the effective global response to COVID-19. We all depend on each other's data to keep us safe

and (we hope) where vaccines should be targeted, the global response is only as good as the worst data.

Countries need to build systems – not silos with walls between institutions or sectors. In the UK, failure to share data between national and local government slowed down the response when cases started to spike, making policy less effective. When coordination has to be global as well as national, the same applies at an international scale.

My organisation, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, is working with the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), building partnerships to strengthen data systems. We are currently engaging in 40 countries across Africa, have built a roster of 30 partners who will work with those countries, bringing different assets to bear, and have already

identify those most at risk, determine the most efficient support and anti-COVID-19 strategies, including partial or total lockdowns, and resulting community needs. To ensure everyone can benefit from this groundbreaking geospatial data, the new findings are openly accessible in a national digital dashboard and COVID-19 hub, which enable easy access for experts and the general public alike.

Stronger data systems, protocols and standards for sharing data across borders are a critical ingredient in the effective global response to COVID-19. We all depend on each other's data to keep us safe.

Good data and information are the foundation for good decisions. The last few months have shown all too clearly that we have a problem with our data. It's up to governments to rise to the challenge, for all our sakes. ●



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COVID-19 and conflict

While levels of conflict worldwide appear relatively unchanged this year, longer term the pandemic may yet have a major impact on political violence and instability. What can the UN and others do to head off the threat?

By **Richard Gowan**, UN Director,
International Crisis Group

When COVID-19 began to spread in the first quarter of 2020, it seemed poised to have a significant impact on wars and political violence worldwide. The virus seemed likely to strike countries in conflict especially hard, overwhelming their war-weakened public health systems, and create instability in other fragile states. To the extent there was any reason for optimism it was in the hope that the pandemic might encourage combatants to pause hostilities and cooperate to contain the virus.

Neither element of this vision of the impact of COVID-19 on conflict has proved entirely correct. The overall effect of the virus on most existing wars has – so far –

been limited. The virus has spread in conflict zones like Yemen and Afghanistan, although it is hard to get reliable data on infections in such cases. Yet the humanitarian effects to date have not been quite as disastrous as first seemed possible. But nor has there been much of a pause in hostilities.

Some analysts have argued that the pandemic has even inspired some states and armed groups to pursue military adventures, knowing that other powers and organisations like the United Nations have been distracted. Indian commentators have cited China's efforts to expand control over disputed territory in the Himalayas as an example of this. But it is impossible to prove that Beijing would not have followed a similar strategy regardless of coronavirus.

It is equally difficult to evaluate the precise impact of the disease and its

economic effects on some of this year's major protest waves, such as the movement sparked by the police killing of George Floyd in the United States and post-electoral anti-government rallies in Belarus. In both cases, citizens were angered by the authorities' mishandling of COVID-19, and this may have been one factor in their decisions to take to the streets. But far deeper-seated sets of injustices ultimately underpinned these protests too.

Elsewhere, there is firmer evidence of the disease encouraging violence. In March and April, security forces enforcing lockdowns in response to coronavirus in countries

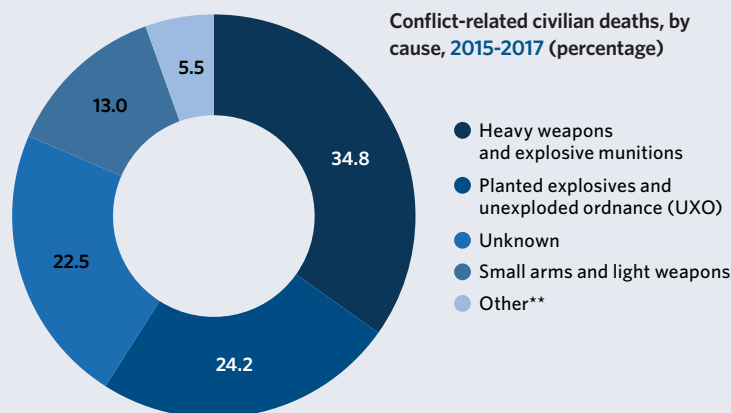
▲ Sanaa, Yemen. Security personnel wearing protective masks enforce a 24-hour curfew amid concerns about the spread of COVID-19

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



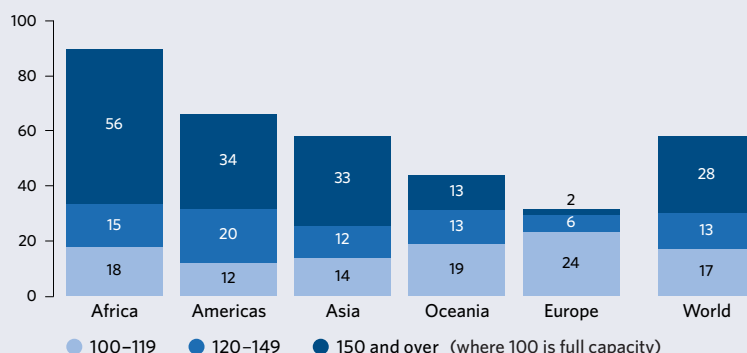
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

In 2019, the number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict exceeded **79.5 million**, the highest level ever recorded



** Weapons that are incendiary; chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear; electromagnetic; or other, 'less lethal' weapons. The category also includes deaths resulting from denial of access or destruction of objects needed for survival, accidents relating to conflict, and other causes.

Proportion of countries where prisoners outnumber capacity, 2018 or latest year (percentage)



Note: The regional groupings shown here are different from the SDG regional groupings. They cover Africa (39 countries), the Americas (41 countries), Asia (43 countries), Europe (51 countries), Oceania (16 countries) and the world (190 countries).

Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

including Kenya, India and Nigeria inflicted casualties on protesting civilians, although in none of these three cases did the initial incidents of violence spiral into more widespread bloodshed. In Colombia, armed bands claiming to enforce quarantine rules have tightened their grip on areas associated with drug trafficking, encountering little resistance from state authorities and massacring civilians.

At the same time, hopes that the pandemic might prod some parties to suspend hostilities have generally not panned out. When UN Secretary-General António Guterres first called for a global ceasefire in response to COVID-19 on 23 March, fighters in over 10 countries expressed interest in the idea. But rebel groups that paused violence in countries including Colombia and the Philippines returned to violence after a month or so. In other cases, such as Libya and Ukraine, political leaders merely nodded to the concept and kept fighting without a break.

Positive examples

There have been some positive examples of political and military rivals working together on technical measures to control COVID-19. In Georgia, for example, officials representing Tbilisi and the breakaway region of Abkhazia collaborated on health issues. The duelling factions in Venezuela also agreed to cooperate on the pandemic, although political tensions remain high.

Another positive development has been that international peace operations and mediation efforts have kept going, albeit with restrictions. As the disease escalated, UN envoys could not travel by air. Peacekeepers in countries such as Ukraine and Mali had to limit their patrols. Like everyone else, mediators say they struggle to run effective meetings on Zoom. Yet the UN and other peacemakers did not suspend their peace efforts altogether.

The bottom line is that levels of political violence and conflict worldwide seem to have remained roughly stable this year. COVID-19 does not appear to have been sufficiently catastrophic to affect the calculations of leaders already locked

in conflicts. This may be a symptom of the disease itself, which while undeniably disruptive does not cause mass fatalities among those of fighting age.

Yet, looking ahead, the pandemic may still have a major impact on conflict and instability.

The economic impact of the disease – leading to a global recession or depression that could hurt poor states especially badly – may prove more disruptive than its initial health effects. Economic pressures linked to the pandemic have already fuelled protests and disorder as far apart as Lebanon and Thailand. While protestors' immediate grievances include issues like unemployment, the economic impact of the pandemic has also highlighted deeper concerns over inequality and poor governance.

Similar issues fuelled first protests and then conflicts that swept the Arab world in 2011 in the wake of the 2008–09 global financial crisis. It is possible that COVID-19 could lead to a similar cycle of disorder and violence in the medium term.

The World Food Programme and other UN agencies have also highlighted that coronavirus-related supply-chain disruptions and rising food prices have increased levels of food insecurity in conflict-affected states like Burkina Faso. Beyond the humanitarian implications, if this trend continues, it is likely to lead to unrest and – just as bread riots preceded the Arab revolutions – foster further political turmoil.

The global downturn may not only lead to economic stress and social discontent in weak states, but also to cuts in international aid. In July, the UK announced reductions of nearly £3 billion in its 2020 aid spending (or 20 per cent of its annual budget). Aid officials and diplomats will find it harder to invest in conflict prevention and assist fragile states facing economic emergencies.

And while the initial impact of the disease in conflict-affected areas was sometimes milder than expected, new waves of COVID-19 could still create humanitarian crises. In late August, a rapid increase of infections was reported in Gaza, threatening to put the densely populated area's weak health systems under immense strain.



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COVID-19 has additionally exacerbated pre-existing tensions in the international system – not least at the United Nations – that could complicate future multilateral crisis management. Disputes between China and the US over the origins of the disease in Wuhan not only led the Trump administration to announce its withdrawal from the World Health Organization, but also delayed the Security Council passing a resolution backing the Secretary-General's global ceasefire idea by three months.

These tensions have not stopped the Security Council keeping up with other business, such as renewing the mandates for 'blue helmet' peace operations. Nonetheless, the Council's rifts over the COVID-19 resolution do not bode well for its ability to respond to future crises driven by the virus.

Multilateral action

Secretary-General Guterres has responded thoughtfully to the crisis, not only in his global ceasefire appeal, but also in broader

▲ Residents take shelter from bombardment in a basement in Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh. The decades-old conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has reignited in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh at a time when the rest of the world is distracted by the pandemic

calls for international efforts to address the economic and social effects of COVID-19. UN officials note that the pandemic and its economic consequences have highlighted the need to concentrate on many of the priorities, such as reducing inequality and improving governance, in the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015.

Whether Member States will rise to the challenge through multilateral action is an open question. Although COVID-19 has not (at least yet) decisively reshaped the global conflict landscape, it has raised questions about how effectively the UN and other multilateral institutions – and the big powers that dominate them – can handle global shocks in an era of international friction. ●



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National interests, global goods

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some world leaders have further instrumentalised the supposed tensions between advancing national interests and protecting global goods. We must find new ways of cooperating that encourage countries to pursue both

By **Adriana Erthal Abdenur** and **Maiara Folly**, Co-Founders, Plataforma CIPÓ (Brazil)

Is there a conflict between preserving global goods and advancing national interests? We address this question at two levels: the institutional and the political. Without discarding the importance of national frameworks and policies to deliver public goods, we argue that pitting the national and global spheres against one another creates a false dichotomy, particularly when it comes to environmental and climate issues.

At an institutional level, sometimes the argument is made that individual states cannot contribute to the preservation of global goods due to limited capacity. But this capacity is often underestimated. In addition, capacity can be considerably enhanced through international cooperation and multi-stakeholder arrangements. Frequently, though, it is lack of political will rather than scarce financial resources or know-how that poses problems – as can be seen, for instance, when the discourse of national sovereignty is mobilised to wilfully overlook internal as well as international responsibilities.

Nationalist leaderships often underscore this idea of a zero-sum game between global good and national interest in order to eschew, disdain or undermine multilateralism. This is not entirely new. In different periods of history, the discourse of national sovereignty has been invoked by leaders not only to reaffirm control over territory and policy space, but also to attack intergovernmental organisations. Nationalist and isolationist tendencies, for instance, contributed towards the failure of the United Nations' predecessor, the League of Nations.

However, over the past few years, nationalism has made a remarkable comeback, including around environmental issues. Against this backdrop, we argue that these institutional and political challenges can be addressed through: a) effective regional and global cooperation and more inclusive models of environmental protection; and b) placing the discursive

emphasis on the ways in which cooperation and multilateralism enhance, rather than detract from, national sovereignty.

Cooperation and more inclusive models of environmental protection

Environmental degradation and climate change effects are more strongly felt locally, but they are often produced globally. The roaring fires in the western coast of the United States, which scientists affirm are intensifying as a result of climate change, are a vivid reminder that climate change affects even the most developed of communities. Increasingly serious environmental issues are appearing or intensifying everywhere – not just in, or because of, the Global South. European countries' reliance on the fossil-fuel economy, the exporting by rich states of pollution-including electronic trash, the mining of metals such as gold, iron and

Environmental degradation and climate change effects are more strongly felt locally, but they are often produced globally

aluminium, and environmental damage due to shale gas fracking in North America are only a few examples. To some extent, international regimes such as the Paris Agreement address unequal responsibilities and burdens, at least to the extent that parties deemed it sufficiently just to sign the agreement.

On the other hand, there are indeed differences in countries' ability to tackle environmental issues. Many of these have arisen from, or are exacerbated by, decades and even centuries of accumulated pollution, contamination and illegal deforestation – all human activities with trans-boundary dynamics. Many states, especially smaller economies, face difficulties in mobilising enough resources to address certain climate-related problems, including extreme weather events, sea-level rise and soil erosion. However, this is not

the reality of all states, and generalisations across the Global South should be avoided. Often there is national capacity to assess risk, design responses and implement them, but the political will is lacking, for instance due to other priorities (such as electoral politics and geopolitical rivalries) or as a result of climate denial.

The case of Brazil provides a useful illustration that the failure to adequately protect the environment is not always an issue of national capacity. Although deforestation in the Amazon, Cerrado and Pantanal biomes (among others) is reaching new peaks due to illegal land invasions and arson, this has not always been the case.

Between 2004 and 2014, deforestation rates in the Amazon forest decreased by 82 per cent, even as productivity in agriculture and ranching increased by 21 per cent. This was achieved through a combined effort by local, state and national governments, as well as collaborative transnational cooperation between private sector actors and civil society, including networks of indigenous groups. Among the policies implemented were: enhanced monitoring through the use of satellite imagery and joint operations by government institutions to tackle environmental crime; enhanced law enforcement capacity; increased numbers of protected and conservation areas; and a soy moratorium.

Brazil also benefited from renewed efforts to promote international collaboration in the Amazon basin, albeit around specific technologies or particular themes. For instance, a bilateral agreement with China allowed Brazil to launch its first independent satellite used to monitor deforestation. Through the Amazon Fund (a mechanism created to raise donations to combat deforestation under the UN-negotiated REDD+ framework), Norway and Germany helped finance solutions to prevent and combat environmental crime in the Brazilian Amazon.

What Brazil is currently lacking, then, is leadership with a vision of how to promote sustainable and inclusive development and, especially, the well-being of indigenous peoples and traditional communities, rather than know-how or resources.

◀ A farmer views the progress of a fire that they set in an area of Amazon rainforest in Para state, Brazil

The case of Brazil may be extreme, but other transnational, climate-sensitive biomes may experience similar dynamics. In addition, inadequate or stalled international cooperation, including through regional arrangements, can in fact restrict the ability of national and subnational actors to tackle climate risks, curb environmental destruction and sustainably manage natural resources, even within their own territory.

Yet it is perfectly possible to develop effective models of transnational governance that preserve, and even enhance, national sovereignty. There are plenty of examples where international cooperation has either been essential to promote environmental protection and fight climate change, or holds considerable promise to do so.

In both the Pacific and the Caribbean, island states have joined forces to boost their resilience and capacity to respond to extreme weather events. And, even though the Great Green Wall initiative to combat desertification in the Sahel has encountered major hurdles, including water shortages, it is now more than halfway towards its goal of consolidating a corridor of planted trees across the entire African continent. In these places, the benefits accruing from cooperative adaptation can help ensure the continuity of key resources.

These examples show that the overlap between advancing national interests and protecting global goods can be maximised through effective cooperation along several modalities: bilateral, trilateral, regional, subregional and trans-regional. In practice, cooperation among subnational governments, such as state and city governments, has also flourished over the past decade – see, for instance, the C40 network of mayors.

However, more effort is needed to ensure that cooperation frameworks are institutionalised and receive adequate resources to allow further innovations to be developed. In addition, the inclusion of non-government actors, or a hybrid thereof, can also create a powerful pool of resources and solutions.

A prominent example of a multi-stakeholder model of environmental governance is the Forest Stewardship Council, which brings together NGOs,

private-sector entities and environmental experts from both developing and developed countries to build global standards for sustainable forest management. Such examples are a reminder that a bolder, more inclusive design of trans-boundary governance is needed for climate-sensitive biomes.

Tempering the discourse of national sovereignty

However, building and consolidating frameworks and channels for cooperation is not enough. Progress on the political front must also be achieved. Even when channels already exist, they can remain under-utilised, be stalled or experience setbacks due to political interference. This is the case of the Amazon Treaty Cooperation Organization, which despite enormous potential exists

Good multilateralism reinforces national sovereignty. A state is no less a state for being a part of the UN system

mostly on paper due to a lack of political will and mutual trust between the eight Amazonian member states.

Recent distrust of international cooperation is associated with the rise of nationalist populist leaders. Although this discourse has long been mobilised by governments across the political spectrum, it is currently being instrumentalised in new, concerning ways. Even states that were founding members of the UN now ramp up this discourse to undermine international regimes, treaties and frameworks of which they too are signatories.

In the case of Brazil, this became extremely apparent in 2019, when forest fires broke new records in the Amazon, which some European heads of state deemed a “matter of international concern”. The backlash from the Brazilian government was swift. It reaffirmed Brazil’s sovereignty over the largest portion of Amazon forest and

denounced foreign actors for supposedly coveting this territory and its natural wealth. This shows that the discourse of national sovereignty is not only mobilised to fulfil domestic political ambitions but can also be triggered by external positions that are viewed by policy elites as potentially interventionist and a threat to national interests.

Some of these tensions around the Amazon form a false dichotomy: the idea that international cooperation for the protection of global goods and the promotion of national interests are contradictory goals. This vision presumes that, in committing to multilateralism, a country’s leadership is giving up the ability to make its own decisions: as if by signing an agreement or embarking on a joint solution, states are giving up power. And it leads to the related claim that multilateralism and national sovereignty are at odds.

In reality, good multilateralism reinforces national sovereignty. A state is no less a state for being a part of the UN system. Even the ‘hardest’ interpretation of sovereignty, which links it closely to control of the territorial space, is enriched by multilateralism. For example, it is the UN that adjudicates proposals to extend maritime waters. Brazil’s maritime territory, for instance, was expanded by 940,000 square kilometres due to decisions taken by the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

More broadly, the UN allows negotiated solutions for collective challenges that have become more diversified, complex and intertwined. From intensifying climate change to widening geopolitical cleavages to emerging issues around new technologies, global ‘public bads’ are proliferating and interacting with old problems, such as social inequality and unfair trade, in new and unexpected ways. This scenario demands collective solutions alongside national responses.

A more useful question, then, is: how can multilateralism be made more effective so as to boost the capacity of states, subnational actors, civil society and the private sector, allowing them to cooperate to better tackle domestic and international challenges? Asking how, rather than if, will lead to more constructive questions and responses. ●



Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz International Prize for Water

Recognizing Innovation



Winners for the 9th Award (2020)



Creativity Prize

1) The team of Dr. Benjamin S. Hsiao (Stony Brook University, New York, USA)

for the development of adsorbents, coagulants and membrane materials from sustainable, biomass-sourced nanocellulose fibres along with numerous practical applications that promise to provide effective water purification for off-grid communities of the developing world. (The team also includes Dr. Priyanka Sharma, research scientist at Stony Brook University).



Dr. Benjamin S. Hsiao

2) The team of Dr. Sherif El-Safty (National Institute for Materials Science, Japan)

for developing novel nano-materials in hierarchal and micrometric monoliths to achieve a nano-filtration/capture/detection process that quantitatively detects and selectively removes a wide range of water contaminants in a single step. A diverse range of these materials, which are conducive to mass-scale production, provides nano-filtration membranes and filters for water management applications, including purification, remediation, and the monitoring of hazard levels of various water sources.



Dr. Sherif El-Safty



Surface Water Prize

Dr. Zbigniew Kundzewicz (Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznan)

for advancing our understanding of the relationship between flood risk, river flow, and climate change.



Dr. Zbigniew Kundzewicz



Groundwater Prize

Dr. J. Jaime Gómez-Hernández (Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain)

for pioneering work on solving the "inverse problem" in hydrogeology.



Dr. J. Jaime Gómez-Hernández



Alternative Water Resources Prize

Dr. Peng Wang (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, Thuwal, Saudi Arabia)

for work at the forefront of solar-evaporation water production technology.



Dr. Peng Wang



Water Management and Protection Prize

Dr. Jay R. Lund (University of California Davis, USA)

for the development of the CALVIN water supply optimization model that couples traditional water-supply criteria with economic considerations.



Dr. Jay R. Lund

Nominations are open for the 10th Award. Nominations can be made online until 31 December 2021.

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Unlocking aid's potential

A focus on poverty and a dynamic civil society are critical to aid effectiveness and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals

By **Danny Sriskandarajah**, Chief Executive, Oxfam Great Britain

What is aid for? It's a timely moment to ask ourselves the question, as the coronavirus pandemic forces the world to re-examine many assumptions and offers the opportunity to radically reimagine our futures. In addition, as we enter the critical decade of action to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it's clear that the way in which aid is designed and delivered has a crucial role to play in their outcomes.

Strip away the politics and debates over foreign policy objectives, and at its heart aid is about helping the world's poorest, most vulnerable, people. What that looks like in practice has come a long way over the years, but in the SDG era I would argue that aid's primary focus should be on reducing poverty. It is welcome, and important, that the range of goals represent interlinked aims to create a safer, healthier planet and more equal societies.

However, there are many non-aid factors such as government, corporate and consumer behaviour, as well as other forms of finance such as tax revenues and state spending choices, that will determine our collective progress on the wider agenda. Aid can help on all the SDGs but it has a particularly important role to play on poverty-related goals, and I believe that civil society holds an important key in unlocking that potential.

A large part of the success, or failure, of the SDGs will depend on the ability of civil society to embed change that is durable and sustainable. Aid, spent wisely and well, could be the really important resource that tips the balance, by making countries and communities more resilient and self-

sufficient. Aid alone will not conserve the oceans, for instance, but aid used by civil-society groups to promote more sustainable fisheries that local communities fully support could make a huge difference.

To take another example: tackling mosquito-borne diseases will take more than supplying bed nets. We also need empowered citizens and civil-society formations that can hold governments to account when interventions are not available, and to push for free, universal health care as a basic human right.

Yet the investment required to build, nurture and sustain strong civil societies is currently not prioritised by funders. Only 1 per cent of all official aid and around 0.2

the communities we exist to serve. As an aid sector, that requires us to be prepared to let go of control and resources. At Oxfam we're in a process of transformation that we hope will mean we live up to this aspiration. We're moving from a traditional confederation model, where headquarters in wealthy nations fund life-saving work in developing countries, to a more balanced, global network of organisations working together as equals with allies.

We have learned from past failings that how we work is as important as what we do, and so our core commitments are to be safe, feminist and led by partners. That includes investing heavily in safeguarding, determined efforts to ensure our culture

If we're to have a chance of achieving our shared goal of lasting, transformative change that ensures no one is left behind, then all of us need to do much more to truly shift power and resources to the communities we exist to serve

per cent of humanitarian assistance goes directly to local organisations in the Global South. That is woefully inadequate. Not least because the pandemic and ensuing lockdown restrictions have underlined once more the vital role of local, bottom-up action. Initiatives and commitments to prioritise funding of locally led humanitarian responses such as the Grand Bargain and the Charter 4 Change are welcome, but the pace of change remains painfully slow.

If we're to have a chance of achieving our shared goal of lasting, transformative change that ensures no one is left behind, then all of us – international NGOs, governments, UN agencies and donors – need to do much more to truly shift power and resources to

matches our values, strengthening feedback mechanisms to improve accountability, and redoubling efforts to fight gender inequality. It means prioritising local humanitarian leadership and working through local partners wherever possible. In some countries, this will be our only way of operating.

At a time when estimates suggest that half a billion more people could be pushed into poverty by the pandemic's economic fallout, we have been working out how to use our limited resources to be most effective. We plan to focus our efforts in some of the most complex and difficult environments – places like Yemen and Democratic Republic of the Congo – where communities face



© Aude Rossignol/PNUD RDC

multiple risks and where safe, high-quality programming costs more but can make the biggest difference to people's lives.

Around the world, we will work to tackle the key underlying causes of poverty such as conflict, climate change and inequality, and to push for structural changes beyond aid such as debt relief, progressive taxation and investment in public services that are the best ways to deliver change at scale.

As we progress on this journey, with all its challenges, it's crucial that we remember to lift our sight to the horizon. In today's hugely unequal world, where the Global North controls so much wealth and resources, I believe there is still a need for some kind of official aid system. Yet,

ultimately, I hope that when that system is no longer needed, its legacy is twofold: a more rapid decline in extreme poverty than would otherwise have happened, and myriad powerful, dynamic civil society networks and social movements that are able to bring together people everywhere. These will be people united by their outrage against what increasingly look like universal struggles against inequality and injustice, whose compassion for others extends beyond national borders.

I remain inspired by the words of Lilla Watson, a long-time campaigner for Aboriginal rights in Australia, who said: "If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. If you have come because your

▲ Building a bridge in Rutshuru, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, part of an aid project designed to reintegrate young people previously involved in armed conflict. As one of the most difficult and complex environments, the DRC remains a focal point for aid efforts

liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

The coronavirus has triggered a paradigm shift in how we think about our world, by laying bare how our fates are bound together. Solidarity is not just a noble aim. Until all of us are safe, none of us are safe. Or to flip that concept on its head: when the world is a more equal place, everyone wins. This is what aid is for. ●



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A new take on trade

How can trade help the global economy recover sustainably from the pandemic?

By **Mukhisa Kituyi**, Secretary-General, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

The COVID-19 pandemic has gravely impacted the global economy.

Countries have sought to contain the spread of coronavirus by limiting the mobility of people, suspending many non-essential activities and implementing social distancing. While these measures have saved countless lives, they have also created the

worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The global economy is now expected to shrink by about 5 per cent in 2020.

While many countries have now begun to resume economic activity, the potential negative effects of the pandemic are far from over. In the absence of reliable vaccines or better treatments, the risk is that further waves of contagion could derail the economic restart. Given the uncertainty, it is essential that policymakers remain vigilant and

continue to devise policies that protect their economies against worsening conditions. As part of this, trade policies will be essential to create a more resilient global economy.

COVID-19 and international trade

In 2019, global trade stood at about \$25 trillion, with estimates then predicting a 3 per cent rise in 2020. Without a swift recovery in the second half of 2020, the consensus now is that trade will instead plummet by about 20 per cent this year, or

◀ Heavy goods vehicles queue near Ashford, England, en route to continental Europe. It is anticipated that trade between the UK and continental Europe will suffer turbulence when the transition period ends at the end of December 2020 and Brexit comes into full force

by about \$6 trillion. Such a decline would be unprecedented, being significantly larger than the \$4 trillion fall seen during the 2009 recession.

The impacts of COVID-19 on international trade have been many and varied. We have seen falling commodity prices, reduced manufacturing output and disrupted operations in global value chains. Trade in services has been significantly affected. International tourism arrivals are expected to fall by between 60 and 80 per cent in 2020. Remittances have greatly diminished.

At the regional level, the picture is mixed. While East Asia appears to be on a recovery path, concerns remain for other developing regions where COVID-19 is not yet under control. As many borders remain closed and safety controls delay the movement of goods, developing countries that are highly reliant on external markets are being hit particularly hard. Small countries with high levels of external debt and limited resources to sustain their economies are most at risk of a severe economic recession.

Before the pandemic, there was a growing scepticism towards international trade. Yet the COVID-19 emergency has shown the importance of keeping trade open in times of crisis. For example, cross-border trade has been instrumental in meeting the demand for COVID-19-related medical products on a global scale. International trade of items such as personal protective equipment and ventilators more than doubled in just a few months. The pandemic has also driven an increase in e-commerce, linking consumers to producers not only domestically but also across borders.

Trade and economic recovery

The past few years have been characterised by the high-profile trade spat between the United States and China. In such a context, the pandemic adds to global instability by

making the conditions unsuitable to meet the commitments of the two superpowers' 'phase one' trade deal. Coronavirus has the potential to further exacerbate tensions, and to create a more segmented and polarised global economy, with obvious negative repercussions for many countries.

While developed and emerging countries have implemented massive economic packages to support people and businesses, many developing countries are severely fiscally constrained in their recovery efforts, and need a lifeline. Development assistance and a moratorium on debt repayments related to COVID-19 are welcome, but a truly global economic recovery will require international markets that remain open and are made more resilient.

While trade restrictions may provide short-term relief, often they provoke retaliation, creating supply shortages and price hikes in international markets

Yet, during periods of economic downturn, the allure of unilateral measures generally increases. For example, at the onset of the pandemic, several countries imposed export restrictions and stockpiled essential medical goods and basic foodstuffs. But countries would be wise to refrain from adopting 'beggar-thy-neighbour' policies. While trade restrictions may provide short-term relief, often they provoke retaliation, creating supply shortages and price hikes in international markets, with dire consequences for the global economy.

Trade protectionism will also increase imbalances in the recovery process, adding to the risk that the pandemic will exacerbate existing inequalities, creating the real possibility that the least developed countries (LDCs) will fall further behind. To avoid an resurgence of protectionist measures, governments must monitor how responses to COVID-19 affect trading partners. They

must ensure that any such measures are targeted and temporary, and duly address the interests of affected countries, particularly LDCs. Ultimately, keeping exports to developing countries flowing without unwarranted impediments will be crucial to a broad-based recovery.

Trade beyond economic gains

The current world economic crisis can serve as an opportunity for redirecting public policy towards a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient global economy. The metrics of the recovery should not be based solely on economic growth but should also consider the other aspects of development agreed in the Sustainable Development Goals.

This will take a concerted effort, as economic downturns often result in diminished environmental protection. We must avoid a 'race to the bottom', where countries seek to secure competitive advantage by watering down environmental safeguards. Instead, to negate this risk, we must align trade policies more closely with climate objectives and further integrate environmental aspects into the international trade framework. For example, international cooperation could focus more closely on greening the trade infrastructure and expanding transnational environmental standards to drive a more sustainable post-COVID-19 economy.

International trade must be part of any recovery effort aimed at building a more fair and sustainable global economy. Promoting free trade as an end in itself, however, will risk fuelling anti-trade sentiments. Instead, the pandemic calls on us to recognise that international trade can have profound effects on lives and livelihoods, both in positive and negative ways.

Commitment to and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development would help to ensure that inclusive trade growth is an economic foundation for sustainable development. The crisis has yet again underscored the case for continued multilateral trade cooperation and for a robust trading system to contribute to the post-crisis recovery. ●



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The SDGs can guide our recovery

Our post-pandemic world must be built on sustainable foundations, not compromised by excessive haste to 'return to normal'

By **Guido Schmidt-Traub**,
Executive Director, UN Sustainable
Development Solutions Network (SDSN)

The global COVID-19 pandemic is a massive setback for both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement. As documented by leading multilateral economic institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and OECD, countries are experiencing unprecedented economic contractions and rising inequalities. As often in such crises, the poor are hit particularly

◀ Students attending school in Southeast Gobi, Mongolia. The region is benefiting from a coordinated urban development project to improve and extend water supply, sanitation services, district heating and road networks

hard, enduring sharp drops in income and rising hunger.

The pandemic has laid bare that some of the richest countries, such as the US and many European states, were unprepared for coronavirus. These countries and many others had not pursued SDG target 3.d, which calls for “early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks”. There is strong evidence from the United States Center for Disease Control that zoonotic diseases like COVID-19 are enabled by environmental degradation, which SDGs 13 (climate action) to 15 (life on land) aim to curb. Other SDG priorities, including better social protection systems, reduced income inequalities, and enhanced multilateral coordination and partnership, would have further increased countries’ resilience. So, the tremendous costs of the pandemic are also the result of insufficient progress towards the SDGs.

Some recent articles in *Nature* have suggested that in the wake of COVID-19, the SDGs have become unachievable. They call instead for lowering the ambition of the Goals. These criticisms are misguided, as they conflate two issues. One is whether the SDGs remain technically achievable and affordable, and the other is whether governments and other stakeholders will do what it takes to meet them. According to reports by the SDSN and IMF, the available evidence suggests that the Global Goals, including the objectives of the Paris Agreement, can be financed at a relatively modest cost of 2 to 3 per cent of world gross product. Detailed technical roadmaps, available for most of the SDGs, also show that the Goals can still be achieved if governments and stakeholders stay focused on them.

Unfortunately, most rich countries – with the notable exception of Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden and the UK – have not been meeting their commitment to

provide 0.7 per cent of gross national income in official development assistance. Some countries have high levels of corruption and mismanagement, which similarly put the Goals out of reach. Meanwhile, many poor countries are simply resource constrained. So, calls for renegotiating the SDGs are misguided and naïve, given the lack of trust among countries. Instead, experts should speak truth to power on how the Goals can still be achieved.

Reaffirming the SDGs

The SDGs are not only achievable, they are also necessary to promote shared, integrated approaches for economic, social and environmental development, including the international collaboration and solidarity that poor countries and global challenges like climate change require. Without such cooperation, it will become much harder to raise the level of ambition and to mobilise the global expert communities for the practical problem-solving that each SDG requires.

The Goals are vital to underpin this multilateral approach, particularly as it is being undermined by the US withdrawals from the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as by ‘populist’ governments in other countries.

So, a critical enabler for the COVID-19 recovery is the reaffirmation of the SDGs. One practical step could be to re-launch the ‘Decade of Action’ to deliver the SDGs initiated by the United Nations early in 2020, just as coronavirus was spreading in China and other countries. Given the depth of the current crisis, the world needs a ‘Decade of Recovery and Action’ that uses the SDGs as the shared global framework for meeting essential social, environmental and economic objectives enabled through a global partnership.

Unlike with earthquakes or other natural disasters, there is no clear ‘before’ and ‘after’ moment with COVID-19. The disease continues to spread fast in many parts of the world. Some countries that had managed to suppress transmission of the virus are now facing a second wave. Even under the most optimistic scenarios, effective vaccines will only be available to all those who need

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them in the coming years. We will therefore have to live with the virus for a while. An effective response requires three areas of action that are equally important and must be pursued concurrently:

- suppress the disease with minimal social and economic damage;
- support the poorest countries and strengthen multilateral cooperation;
- invest in building back our societies to make them prosperous, resilient and sustainable.

First, countries cannot choose between curbing the spread of the virus and the health of their economies. Asian countries, like South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam, have shown that strong public health measures (social distancing, widespread testing, comprehensive contact tracing, rigorous quarantine measures for infected individuals, and effective treatment) can suppress the virus without the need to lock down an economy. Countries that do not put in place these essential public health measures will sustain massive economic and social costs from the pandemic.

Second, poorer countries need more solidarity and support from the rest of the world. There will be no safety and no return to any semblance of normality for rich countries if poor countries are not assisted and instead become large reservoirs of COVID-19 infections from which the virus could strike back at any time.

Several multilateral health-financing institutions are coordinating their support for countries to fight COVID-19, and the European Union has launched international appeals for more financing. Notably, Germany has announced a large COVID-19 emergency programme with a focus on supporting poor countries in Africa and elsewhere, but few other rich countries are following this example. The coronavirus-related financing needs for Africa, as identified by the UN Economic Commission for Africa and African finance ministers, remain largely unmet.

While the sums are impossible for poor countries to finance themselves, they fall well within the volume of development assistance promised by rich countries. And

they are a tiny fraction of the financing that these rich countries are mobilising to restart their own economies. It is therefore not only urgent and in the interest of rich countries to close the financing gap for poor countries, but it is also entirely affordable.

Finally, countries need to chart out long-term recovery strategies from COVID-19. Such strategies must first do no harm, so they must not foster environmental degradation that raises the risk of zoonotic diseases, accelerates climate change, or undermines human health (for example, through air pollution). They must also

invest in information and other modern technologies to accelerate the shift towards sustainable development. Together, these six transformations will achieve the SDGs.

The European Union and a few countries in Asia have recently announced ‘green deals’ that pursue many of these SDG transformations. In particular, Europe’s determination to place the European Green Deal at the centre of policymaking and international diplomacy sets an example for others to follow. China has also announced plans for a green recovery from COVID-19 and is working to green its infrastructure

Countries cannot choose between curbing the spread of the virus and the health of their economies. Asian countries, like South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam, have shown that strong public health measures can suppress the virus without the need to lock down an economy

not increase inequalities or undermine social safety nets, as this would reduce their societies’ resilience to shocks like COVID-19. The *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* suggests that many recovery strategies from the 2008–10 financial crisis failed this essential do-no-harm test, so governments will need to think more creatively this time around.

The *Sustainable Development Report 2020* outlines how six SDG transformations can guide strategies for building back better from COVID-19. The first transformation focuses on investments in education and lowering inequalities. Second, countries should prioritise policies and investments in health systems and human well-being. Third, energy systems and industry must be decarbonised and become sustainable, which will help boost employment and avoid catastrophic climate change.

Next, land use and food systems must be transformed to ensure healthy and sustainable food, ensure rural prosperity, curb climate change and halt the loss of biodiversity. Fifth, cities around the world must become sustainable and productive. And, finally, countries need to

investments, including under its Belt and Road Initiative. The upcoming EU–China summit offers a unique opportunity for these two players to forge a shared approach that can also give new momentum for next year’s climate and biodiversity conferences in Glasgow and Kunming, respectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic has become the most severe and widespread shock to human development in recent memory. Fortunately, we know how to suppress the virus, and many countries have shown how to do so at low economic and social costs. We also have the institutions and promises in place to extend support to poorer countries. In the interest of everyone, this support must now materialise and needs to go hand in hand with efforts to strengthen multilateral institutions like the WHO and frameworks such as the Paris Agreement.

Finally, the SDGs provide us with a powerful, shared roadmap to guide countries’ recovery strategies and promote multilateral cooperation. Over the next six months, every country should put forward its strategy for turning the SDGs into the ‘North Star’ for building back better from COVID-19. ●



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Prioritising decent work

Around the world, the pandemic is rendering once-safe jobs potentially unviable. What must governments do to keep the ambition of full, productive and decent employment for all alive?

By **Sabina Dewan**, President and Executive Director, JustJobs Network

On 31 December 1999, minutes before the dawning of a new millennium, American President Bill Clinton stood at Washington DC's Lincoln Memorial and declared: "The great story of the 20th century is the triumph of freedom and free people, a story told in the drama of new immigrants, the

struggles for equal rights, the victories over totalitarianism, the stunning advances in economic well-being..." Just two decades into the new millennium, the fragility of these victories is glaringly apparent.

This century has seen the subjugation of people under rising economic inequality. COVID-19 is exacerbating this trend. The pandemic has grown from a health crisis into an economic one, threatening livelihoods across the globe. It is reversing

many hard-won development gains and endangering the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Composition of growth

Research by the International Monetary Fund confirms that inequality is bad

▲ A vocational training centre for women in Nouakchott, Mauritania, where seamstresses sew cloth masks to protect vulnerable and disabled persons from COVID-19

for growth. But the pandemic has also highlighted that inequality left unchecked erodes economic strength and resilience. Rebuilding in the wake of the pandemic offers an opportunity to correct our course.

To do so, first, decision-makers must abandon the outdated assumption that economic growth will itself lead to more, and eventually better, jobs. Even before the pandemic, capital intensification and technology were fuelling economic growth in many developing nations. But this growth did not generate enough employment to absorb their surplus labour.

COVID-19 is making things worse. Sectors from tourism to hospitality, and from aviation to retail, are taking a hit. Fewer jobs coupled with large and growing youth populations in many developing nations are exacerbating the labour surplus, exerting downward pressure on wages and working conditions. A lack of productive jobs and low wages manifest in a decline in private consumption and low aggregate demand. This adversely affects production and investment, creating a vicious cycle.

The composition of economic growth matters. Beyond emergency relief for the

most vulnerable, policymakers must target stimulus measures at supporting labour-intensive sectors ranging from agro-processing and infrastructure to apparel and garments.

Social security

Second, governments must strengthen access to social security, initially providing public assistance to the most economically vulnerable, but seeking to eventually expand the public provision of universal benefits.

As the pandemic brings social and economic activity to a standstill, it is not only increasing unemployment. The Global South is also witnessing an uptick in informal and precarious work. The rise in informal employment and deterioration of working conditions squanders precious productive potential and reduces consumption power.

The International Labour Organization estimates that the global loss in labour income was \$3.5 trillion in the first three quarters of 2020 as a result of a decline in working hours and activities. The reduction in working hours in the Global South is a result of the fragmentation of low-

productivity informal jobs, which is growing in these troubled times.

In developing nations, the poor cannot afford to be unemployed, so many resort to sharing out low-productivity work to make ends meet. The pandemic is deepening this trend.

In India, for instance, the national lockdown instituted at the end of March led to a significant loss of labour income. But even during the lockdown, the sale of food – including by informal street-side vegetable vendors – was considered an essential activity exempt from the lockdown. As a result, anecdotal evidence suggests that many workers, unable to undertake their normal income-generation activities, resorted to selling vegetables to survive.

Moreover, as bricks-and-mortar businesses fail, more workers are turning to the ‘gig’ economy to try to make a living, but an oversupply of labour in these sectors will drive down working conditions further.

Informal, self-employed and contractual workers generally lack social security coverage. As the share of these workers grows, social security provision becomes delinked from employment. It therefore falls to governments to provide coverage. Benefits are not only good for worker productivity, but they also help smooth consumption during times of distress and demand shocks.

Human capital

Third, governments must make critical investments in human capital with an emphasis on helping children from economically underprivileged backgrounds.

Although school enrolment has increased significantly over the last several years, the education and training systems in many developing nations have not kept pace with the changing needs of a 21st century labour market. Children from economically vulnerable households are particularly at risk of receiving poor-quality education, learning and training facilities.



◀ Electronics engineering students of Batam State Polytechnic, Indonesia, design their own printed circuit boards

The pandemic is widening the chasm between economically privileged children and those from socio-economically weaker strata. Many children are unable to attend school. While the middle and upper classes have access to the technology that enables distance learning, children from disadvantaged households do not. This sets children from disadvantaged backgrounds further behind in their trajectories, sowing the seeds of inequality for years to come.

Constrained fiscal space in many developing countries makes it even more challenging to realise these ambitions, at precisely the time that the need is growing. But laying out an iterative approach with clear priorities is a good place to begin. An economic crisis such

Globalisation lifted millions out of poverty... Yet it is now apparent that many were just one health emergency away from falling back

as this inevitably transforms the fiscal calculus. Governments must loosen their fiscal restraint to help their economies stabilise and recover by prioritising job-rich economic growth, instituting effective social protection, and making appropriate investments in human capital.

Before the pandemic, globalisation and the ensuing economic expansion unquestionably lifted millions out of poverty. In the aggregate, the world seemed healthier and more literate than in the past.

Yet it is now apparent that many were just one health emergency away from falling back into poverty. Lower infant mortality and higher life expectancy, particularly in the absence of affordable access to quality healthcare, did not lead to healthier lives. Literacy did not always translate into greater employability or economic mobility. Now, as governments recover and rebuild after the pandemic, there is an opportunity to set things right. ●

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

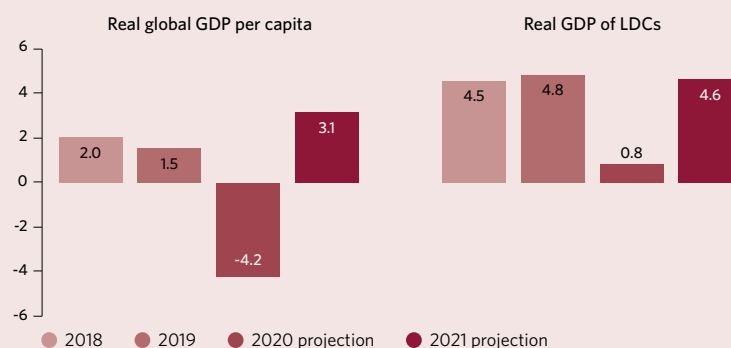


The world faces the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. GDP per capita expected to decline by **4.2%** in 2020

During the pandemic, **1.6 billion** workers in the informal economy risk losing their livelihoods

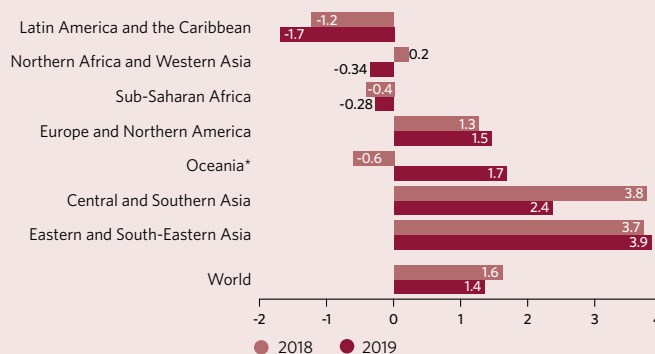


Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita, comparing global total and least developed countries (LDCs), 2018–2021 (percentage)



Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person, 2018 and 2019 (percentage)

The steady global growth in labour productivity since 2000 has masked some pronounced regional differences. 2020 will see the growth falter as working hours are reduced and economies contract.



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020



© MR Cole/Getty Images

Is capitalism broken?

If so, can we fix it in time to achieve the SDGs? Or is the Decade of Action time to replace capitalism with a new economic system altogether?

By **Denise Hearn**, adviser, writer, speaker and co-author of *The Myth of Capitalism: Monopolies and the Death of Competition*

Is capitalism broken? To answer this question, we must first ask what we mean by the term 'capitalism'. Capitalism has become a moniker for a number of varied but overlapping world views. Ideologues, using the term for political exaggeration, at times make capitalism a caricature of itself. This makes it difficult to begin from first principles when unpacking various benefits and ailments of the system.

Capitalism is usually presented as an idealised version of free-market economics driven by the invisible hand of market

equilibrium. Dictionary definitions of capitalism state that it is a system characterised by private ownership (including property) and competitive free markets. While this sounds good to many, as my co-author and I detail in *The Myth of Capitalism: Monopolies and the Death of Competition*, even in countries considered bastions of free-market capitalism (like the United States), competition has withered as more and more of the economy has come under the control of mega-firms that own entire industries.

Decades of industry consolidation from merger waves have left a significant proportion of industries more concentrated than ever. The beer, airlines, banking, kidney dialysis, defence, insurance,

agriculture, pharmaceuticals and consumer goods industries, among others, have little meaningful competition.

Free markets are more a figment of imagination than a lived reality. No country in the world operates a purely free market. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative US foundation, lists the freest economies in the world each year on its Index of Economic Freedom. Hong Kong and Singapore usually vie for the top two spots. Looking more closely at this, however, reveals more nuance.

▲ The business district of Singapore, ranked by The Heritage Foundation as the freest economy in the world

Singapore, in the top spot in 2020, is a highly state-controlled experiment in urban and economic planning. More than 80 per cent of Singaporeans live in state-owned housing through the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore, and private property ownership is rare for native Singaporeans. Singapore's sovereign wealth funds GIC and Temasek have large holdings in a number of state-owned enterprises that play a large role in the country's economy. GIC and Temasek are two of the top 10 sovereign wealth funds in the world by assets under management.

Hong Kong is also consistently listed as one of the world's freest economies by the *Wall Street Journal*. Hong Kong's economy is controlled by a handful of oligarchical family dynasties that have duopolies in many markets: supermarkets, electricity, drug stores and real estate conglomerates. Increasing pressure from China will also restrict the freedom of markets in the country. Hong Kong is also at a 45-year high in economic inequality, with soaring housing costs driving many people to live in illegal subdivided flats. The 'economic freedom' meant to come from free markets applies to a subset of the population and is not widely shared.

Depth perception

So the first myth we must debunk is that capitalism provides free and competitive markets without any interference. In fact, it is only the continual interference of regulators in the form of antitrust enforcement and other sector-specific regulation that continues to ensure markets are, indeed, an even playing field.

The alternative to capitalism is often presented as socialism, and its various intellectual children such as social democracy and statism. The two systems are seen as polar opposites. However, pitting capitalism and socialism against one another is entirely the wrong debate and dichotomy.

Our physical sight is based on parallax – the phenomenon of two distinct perceptions of reality (in each eye) coming together to give us depth perception. Similarly, it is our ability to integrate different ways of seeing and seemingly oppositional viewpoints that gives us depth. As F. Scott Fitzgerald

famously said: "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."

If we are able to see capitalism with one eye and socialism with the other, then when we open both eyes we will see a truer picture of reality: that every economy in the world is a mixture of the two intellectual traditions. When we drive our car on the highway, the market gave us the car and the state gave us the road. We can live in two realities at once.

This is important for discussions around supporting and meeting the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets – because it will not be a battle of ideologies that will get us to where we need to go. It is time to move beyond dualistic language, and beyond the debates about whether capitalism alone can solve our problems. It is clear that the current system of extraction and accumulation is failing to deliver both the prosperity and the environmental protection we need to live and thrive on planet Earth together.

World views

In this vein, I would describe four predominant categories of world views regarding capitalism: believers, reformers, apostates and prophets. I use religious terminology because our adherence to capitalism is a religion of sorts: the world is built on ideas, and capitalism is one dogma with an enormously outsized influence. We have broadly adhered to beliefs about the world, ourselves and how we relate to one another that have shaped how we organise markets, trade, economic valuation and measurement of progress. These are not fixed, but rather evolutionary and flexible ideas that will continue to morph and change over time.

True believers in capitalism operate on faith that the invisible hand of the market will produce equilibrium, fair pricing and broad prosperity. They often cite as supporting evidence for their views that billions of people have been lifted out of poverty through international trade, and the large strides in global health and living standards.

Reformers believe that capitalism is not fundamentally broken, but it does require

tweaks – which usually come in the form of regulation to curtail excesses or in a moral reawakening of leaders who will create more beneficent corporations and investments to spur change. Reformers advocate for stakeholder capitalism, benefit corporations, environmental, social and governance standards (ESG), sustainable investing and other tools with the aim of producing a more moral and integrated capitalism that benefits a wider set of stakeholders and the environment.

Apostates have abandoned capitalism altogether, usually advocating some form of its opposite, socialism being the most obvious example (though as we discussed above, a false dichotomy). An argument made popular by Thomas Piketty (author of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*) a few years ago states that capital 'devours the future' – meaning that past capital acquires more power in an interest-bearing debt economy, making it easier for capital to accumulate, capitalists to become rentiers, and inequality to worsen.

Lastly, prophets are those who question the fundamental assumptions underpinning these debates and call us to return to first principles. Should we have an economic system based on interest-bearing debt when many major religions outlawed the practice for thousands of years? Is perpetual growth, as we currently understand it, an appropriate goal of economic systems? How should we measure and understand true value, and is it appropriate to place everything on Earth, including the natural world, under economic valuation to determine its worth? Prophets call us to consider alternative futures of things that have not yet been tried on a global scale.

Meeting the SDGs, in my opinion, will require the input, creativity and integration of many more prophets. It is clear that tweaks around the edges will not save us fast enough, and it is clear that capitalism as it is practised now, even in its myriad and complex forms, will not save us either if not aimed at different objectives. The SDGs give us those new objectives, and it is the imperative of our time to reorient our economic systems, whatever name we end up calling them, to these outcomes. ●

What role for private finance?

If countries were struggling to finance the necessary transformations to achieve the SDGs, COVID-19 has only made the situation worse. How can the international community encourage safer borrowing mechanisms, with a greater role for private credit, to bridge the shortfall?

By **Sonja Gibbs**, Managing Director and Head of Sustainable Finance, Global Policy Initiatives, Institute of International Finance

With less than 10 years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the 2030 target, the international development community remains hard at work to realise full implementation by the deadline. Failure to progress on the SDGs would leave countries more vulnerable to financial crises while reducing their capacity to mitigate or adapt to the impact and risks of climate change, extreme poverty and rising inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the fragility of our economies and societies to unexpected shocks.

While forecasters will need time to determine the full economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, it is clear that the pandemic could impair progress towards the SDGs. With their less diversified economies, many emerging markets (EMs) and, especially, low-income countries (LICs) will find it even more challenging to mobilise limited domestic resources towards the SDGs.

Against the backdrop of large job losses and lacklustre corporate earnings, a deterioration in household and corporate balance sheets could endanger the speed and the strength of the recovery while limiting external funding opportunities for many countries. This surge in sectoral indebtedness could prompt companies and households to deleverage – sell assets to reduce debt – as the recovery matures. This could place growth well below potential, further hindering progress towards the SDGs.

Many LICs, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, remain far off target. This unfortunate reality mainly reflects the difficulty in sourcing the investment needed to build resilient infrastructure for sustainable industrialisation. Success over the next decade will require addressing an SDG financing gap of \$5–7 trillion per year, with EMs and LICs making up over \$2.5 trillion of the total. SDG investment needs in EMs and LICs are particularly notable in power infrastructure (\$790 billion), climate change mitigation (\$700 billion) and transport infrastructure (\$650 billion).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that EMs need additional annual spending of 4 per cent of GDP to reach the SDGs by 2030. The scope of the challenge for LICs is even more daunting, with average incremental spending needs of some 15 per cent of GDP per year. With the public sector still the main funding source of social and economic infrastructure in LICs, the challenge of meeting high SDG financing needs will add to concerns about rising indebtedness. With persistent budget deficits in many LICs, government debt has risen rapidly over the past decade, increasing from some 30 per cent of GDP in 2011 to nearly 47 per cent in 2019. As COVID-19 continues to unfold, LIC government debt is expected to surge by over seven percentage points to nearly 55 per cent of GDP this year – the largest annual increase since 2000. This has left many of these fragile countries struggling with higher financing costs and debt sustainability. According to the IMF, as of June 2020, eight LICs were already in debt distress – in other words, experiencing difficulties in servicing their debt. Another 27 countries are at the high risk of falling

into debt distress due to increasing external debt burdens.

Sustainable approach

Within this landscape lies tremendous opportunities for the private sector across the spectrum of investment vehicles – including foreign direct investment (FDI), listed and unlisted equity and private equity, in addition to the wide variety of debt instruments. Given the massive build-up of EM debt over the past two decades, a shift towards more non-debt financing could be a more sustainable approach to closing the SDG funding gap.

One aspect of the problem is inefficiencies in public investment: nearly 40 per cent of public investment in LICs does not turn into tangible ‘public capital stock’. Further, at present, reliance on debt-generating capital flows (FDI debt, portfolio debt, bank loans and trade credit) is much higher for LICs compared to their EM peers. One potential remedy is improving domestic tax regimes and incentivising funding alternatives and partnerships that promote non-debt-creating capital flows such as equity finance. This in turn would reduce pressure on fiscal budgets. However, establishing an effective framework for monitoring public-private partnerships and associated contingent liabilities will be vital to managing key fiscal risks and encouraging private-sector SDG financing.

Another problem for many LICs is lack of transparency about the full extent and nature of their debt obligations – in some cases associated with ‘hidden debt’ or poorly understood contingent liabilities, as well as weak governance. The resulting uncertainty can increase the risk of debt distress, constrain market access or result in higher borrowing costs.



▲ The utility-scale, grid-connected, 8.5 MW solar field in Rwamagana, Rwanda was built, financed and is operated by the Dutch firm, Gigawatt Global

Diversification in the external creditor base would also help. At present, official bilateral and multilateral creditors are the major external funding source for most LICs, comprising 80 per cent of public external debt. Establishing SDG-dedicated LIC debt funds and SDG-aligned bond issuance that is partially guaranteed by multilateral development banks could help mobilise private creditors. Furthermore, development of domestic bond markets could help channel domestic funding towards SDGs while adding welcome diversification in the investor base.

Official development assistance (ODA) – government aid to developing countries – could also play a greater role in promoting FDI in LICs, while fostering social and economic infrastructure development in fragile and less-developed countries. The strategic use of ODA financing and enhanced risk mitigation could help scale

up private non-debt finance – for example, through blended finance (mixed commercial and philanthropic funding), de-risking (the non-profit and state sector taking on or underwriting risk to maintain interest from the profit sector) and public-private partnerships. It could also mobilise much-needed international private capital for SDG-related long-term infrastructure projects.

However, despite their vital role in financing the SDGs, ODA inflows as a percentage of GDP have been on a downward trend since 2003. While contributions from the 30 members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee account for 60 per cent of total ODA flows into LICs, they remain well below donor countries' 2015 pledges and a long way short of states' 1970 commitment to raise ODA funding to 0.7 per cent of gross national income. International financial

institutions can play a more active role in scaling up ODA financing to deliver the SDG agenda – for example, through poverty-reduction strategy processes.

International collaboration

Priorities on SDG financing will obviously vary across countries, but the success of the SDG agenda entails global collaboration across a broad range of stakeholders, including international and regional development partners, national governments and, increasingly, the private sector. To make the 2020s a true 'decade of delivery' for the SDGs, ensuring a more targeted, efficient global allocation of private capital is a vital step. ●



A holistic approach to sustainable finance

Sustainability is in Liechtenstein's DNA, and is critical to the success of its world-renowned financial centre – both today and for generations to come



Simon Tribelborn,
Director, Liechtenstein
Bankers Association

In 2019, the principality of Liechtenstein celebrated its 300th anniversary, attracting attention far beyond our 160 square kilometres. What is less well known, however, is that since 2013, all 11 of Liechtenstein's municipalities have been certified with the label 'Energy City' under the European Energy Award Scheme. The principality is therefore the only country in the world that can call itself an 'Energy Country'. The label symbolises that both policymakers and wider society have a strong sense of environmental responsibility.

Liechtenstein has also created unique public-private sustainability partnerships that are playing pioneering roles internationally. The Waterfootprint Liechtenstein project, launched in 2019, promotes a simple principle: drink tap water, donate drinking water. With this campaign, Liechtenstein aims to become the first country to provide access to clean drinking water to at least the same number of people in developing countries as the number of its own residents. The project is on track to meet this goal by the end of 2020.

Another 'lighthouse' project is Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking, part of the Liechtenstein Initiative. This partnership project involves the governments

of Liechtenstein, Australia and the Netherlands, the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, plus a consortium of banks, philanthropic foundations and associations. The UN estimates that more than 40 million people worldwide are in modern slavery, including about 25 million people in forced labour. Approximately 16 million of these are in the private sector, working in domestic service, construction or agriculture.

While more than half of all people working as slaves live in India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan, there are also about half a million people in Europe existing in slavery-like conditions. The International Labour Organization estimates that about \$150 billion of illegal profits are generated each year through slavery and human trafficking. In many cases, the goods that enslaved people produce – including tobacco and food – end up in legitimate distribution channels. Studies also show that modern slavery and human trafficking are the most common predicate offences (crimes that are part of more serious crimes) of money laundering and terrorist financing in the world today. So it is vital that countries like Liechtenstein, with its broadly diversified economy and strong industrial and financial centres, take a stand.



© Alamy

These initiatives show that Liechtenstein understands that sustainability is not just about climate action, but that it also concerns broader aspects of society and government. They also illustrate our commitment to sustainability as a global issue that concerns all people, everywhere. And the examples show that it's in our DNA to think and act on sustainability for the long term, for the sake of present and future generations.

For Liechtenstein's banks, sustainability is also an integral part of their corporate culture. Their business models are focused on longevity, with all banks distancing themselves from short-term profiteering. No bank is, or has been, active in investment banking. Our banks have a strong sense of corporate responsibility, evidenced by many of their actions: from their own public-benefit foundations, to all three major banks' involvement in the Swiss and Liechtenstein climate foundations. Liechtenstein's banks have also enacted a wide range of energy-efficiency measures – including a commitment to climate neutrality – and set high corporate governance standards.

This sense of responsibility is deeply enshrined in banks' core business models. The Liechtensteinische Landesbank, for instance, has offered an 'ecological and renovation mortgage' since 2004 for customers wanting to invest in sustainable buildings. It also employs the standards of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) in its sustainability reporting. LGT, the world's largest private banking and asset management group to be owned by an

entrepreneurial family, has been a pioneer of sustainable investment for many years. Its LGT Venture Philanthropy Foundation, for example, seeks to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged people, while its LGT Lightstone impact investing platform focuses on investments that improve living conditions for underserved people.

Data show that the banks' focus on sustainable, long-term success is the right approach to take. An analysis of all Liechtenstein funds in 2016 showed that the average ESG rating (an evaluation of the environmental, social and governance factors in companies) was about 60 out of 100 points. The results also showed that many of Liechtenstein's equity funds met the ESG criteria to a high degree. No Liechtenstein bank had to ask for state aid during or after the financial crisis of 2008–10. Assets under management have increased steadily and, at more than CHF 350 billion worldwide, are now at a record level. With an average core capital (Tier 1) ratio of more than 20 per cent, Liechtenstein's banks are also among the most financially stable worldwide.

Towards a sustainable future

Taking a holistic, sustainable approach to business isn't just 'the right thing to do': it also makes sound investment sense. The coronavirus crisis has demonstrated dramatically that sustainable financial investments are more resistant to crises than conventional investments. Numerous studies also show that returns on sustainable investments can match or even significantly outperform those of conventional investments in the medium to long term. Non-sustainable investments entail higher financial risks for long-term investors, leading to lower returns over time.

For both Liechtenstein and its financial centre, the future belongs to sustainability. But it's essential that we think about and practise sustainability holistically. And the path towards a sustainable future must be taken in partnership – between different generations, industries and countries. In this regard, the UN, as a global organisation now in its 75th year, plays an essential role. The Sustainable Development Goals have given us and the entire world not only a shared vision and framework to guide us towards the future, but also a clear set of instructions and a mandate. The Liechtenstein banking and financial centre is ready – and setting the course. ■

ABOUT THE LIECHTENSTEIN BANKERS ASSOCIATION

Established in 1969, the Liechtenstein Bankers Association (LBA) is the domestic and international voice of the banks operating in and out of Liechtenstein. It is one of the country's most significant associations and plays a key role in the successful development of the financial centre.

Member interests are pursued in accordance with the principles of sustainability and credibility. As a member of the European Banking Federation (EBF), the European Payments Council (EPC) and the European Parliamentary Financial Services Forum (EPFSF), the LBA is a member of key committees at the European level and plays an active role in the European legislative process.

Since 2017, the LBA has also been a member of the Public Affairs Council (PAC) with offices in Washington and Brussels. Since March 2018, it has been a member of the international network, the Financial Centres for Sustainability (FC4S).

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How to build a more equal world

Like other global crises, the pandemic disproportionately affects women. It shows that nothing less than urgent, radical, transformative action is needed to create a post-COVID-19 world that empowers all women and girls

By **Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**,
Executive Director, UN Women

Just as the World Health Organization identified COVID-19 as a pandemic, UN Women launched our analysis of the global status of women's rights, showing limited and fragile progress in the 25 years since the adoption of the landmark Beijing Platform for Action on gender equality. The year 2020 also marks the first major staging point for the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs), five years after Member States unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda. The pandemic's impacts have revealed and intensified the precarious situation of women, especially in terms of their economic security, physical safety and access to decision-making spaces.

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed serious problems with the ways we have constructed our societies and economies on the backs of women's unpaid labour. This uncomfortable insight links to important

questions about the kind of world that we want to live in, and how we get there. As we enter the Decade of Action on the SDGs, there is an opportunity to 'build back better', with women's rights at the centre, to prioritise care for people and planet, and to energise progress on gender equality, for the benefit of all.

COVID-19's profound impacts on labour and poverty

Over the last 25 years, we have seen

◀ **Kabul, Afghanistan.** A production studio at Zan TV, a station making programmes for and run entirely by women

women's participation in the labour force stagnate. This was already a deep concern because of the importance of economic empowerment for other aspects of gender equality. It is even more worrying because of the quality and nature of women's jobs. Women are over-represented among the informally employed, in jobs that lack social protection such as sick leave or health insurance.

In many developing countries, most women are employed in domestic work, or jobs that require them to be in public spaces, like market trading. As countries have locked down, those jobs have been lost to protect public health, leaving millions of women with no livelihood. Without support from government measures that recognise their situation, women face the impossible choice of risking exposure to the virus or going hungry. At the same time, day-care centres and schools have shut, pushing care work back into homes and dramatically increasing it – for women. There is some evidence that men are taking on a little more, and campaigns like #HeForSheAtHome have raised the profile of domestic equality, with one billion views of the campaign on TikTok in India alone.

However, this work is still hugely unequally distributed, with women doing three times as much as men. In countries with weak health systems, it is women who are stepping up to care for the sick at home, often at considerable risk to their own health. Meanwhile, as available resources are drawn into the COVID-19 response, sexual and reproductive health services are suffering (as in previous crises), threatening progress made on reducing maternal mortality.

Without determined and targeted action, the resulting hardship will be profound. UN Women's research shows that in 2021 alone, 47 million women and girls could be pushed into extreme poverty as a result of COVID-19, bringing the total to 435 million. Women of reproductive age will be disproportionately affected by the pandemic, compared with men.

During this crisis, the combination of economic devastation and stay-at-home orders have trapped millions of women in domestic settings with violent abusers. We know from service providers – mostly small-scale women's organisations – that demand for their support has increased as much as fivefold. As work and public services have moved online, cyber violence has intensified, with new forms of violence such as 'Zoom-bombing' emerging to intimidate and harass women and girls. And, in parallel, violence in public spaces is increasing as women and girls venture out across deserted streets between home and work.

The UN Secretary-General urged governments to put women and girls at the centre of their efforts to recover from COVID-19, with equal representation and decision-making power. So far, 146 countries have committed to make the prevention and redress of violence against women and girls a key part of their national response plans. These include proactive efforts to integrate measures in preparedness and recovery plans to address violence, and ensure they are adequately resourced. This is certainly an area where greater prioritisation is desperately needed. It is estimated that between 2014 and 2019, investment in the prevention of violence against women and girls totalled less than 0.002 per cent of annual official development assistance.

Political leadership is crucial to mobilising these essential changes and reflecting women's specific needs in the development, scrutiny and monitoring of COVID-19 policies, plans and budgets. Women are heads of state or government in just 22 countries, yet in countries like Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand and Slovakia they are being recognised for their efforts to 'flatten the curve'.

Building back better for women and girls

As the world learns to live with COVID-19 and starts to rebuild and recover, we must seize the opportunity to go beyond fragile, incremental progress, to more transformative change. This is what Agenda 2030 demands of us. What are the key

elements of an agenda to 'build back better', encompassing visionary alternatives for sustainable and inclusive economies and societies?

Support for the care economy must be a major part of the answer. Feminists have been saying for years that the care economy is the foundation of the global economy. Now, COVID-19 has catapulted the care economy into the public consciousness as never before. The vast amount of care and domestic work – either unpaid or poorly paid – that women have always done in homes, schools, hospitals and communities has been the backbone of the COVID-19 response.

To recognise, value and support this work, we need public investment in integrated care systems to provide care from cradle to grave. This would include investing in recruiting, training and providing safe working conditions for healthcare workers at every level, from doctors to community health workers and unpaid carers in homes.

Some 18 million more health workers will be needed by 2030 to achieve universal health coverage and the SDGs. Filling this gap would bolster health systems, enabling them to provide essential services like responding to violence as well as sexual and reproductive healthcare, and to be ready for future pandemics. It would also create decent public-sector jobs for women, helping to address the deficits in women's economic opportunities.

Care must be integrated into universal and gender-responsive social protection systems to ensure basic access to income and services. During the current pandemic, the availability of paid leave, cash transfers and food for families has been a lifeline for millions. The countries that already had robust social protection systems in place have been able to weather the crisis more effectively than those starting from scratch. Fewer than three people in ten worldwide enjoy access to comprehensive social security. Now is the time to accelerate efforts towards universality of these basic rights.

A green recovery

The idea of care has traditionally been applied to the care of people, but what if

5 GENDER EQUALITY



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



25%
In national
parliaments



36%
In local
government

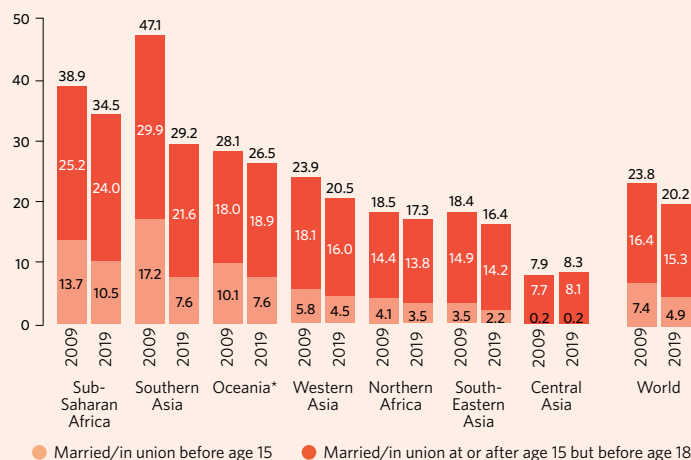
◀ Women must be represented fairly in pandemic-related leadership roles

Women are on the front lines of fighting the coronavirus ▶



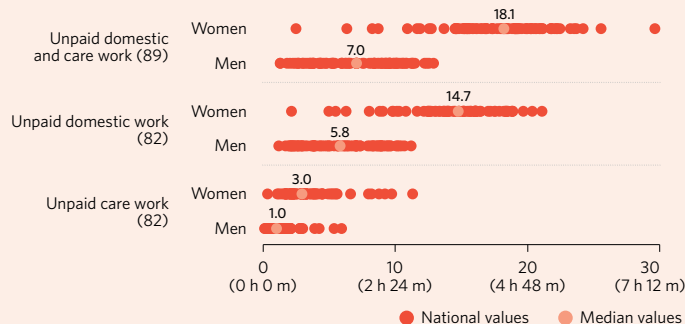
Women account for **70%** of health and social workers

Proportion of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 15 and before age 18, around 2009 and around 2019



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, women and men, 2001-2018 (latest available) (percentage of time spent per day)



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

we extended that idea to care for the planet too? Like unpaid care work, the value of natural resources and environmental services (such as the capacity of the oceans or forests to absorb carbon) has too often been invisible to policymakers and economists.

Yet, as the ability of the natural environment to provide these services erodes, failure to care for the planet will make it increasingly inhospitable. It is the poorest women in the poorest countries who will suffer most, although they have done the least to cause the problem.

We should not miss the opportunity to make the recovery from COVID-19 into a green recovery, and to set the environmental SDGs back on track. This means accelerating the transition away from carbon-intensive, polluting economies, through investments in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure, such as water, electricity and transport.

To ensure this shift is a 'just transition', women must have access to the reskilling needed to ensure that they have access to these new green jobs.

The cost of success?

All of this requires finance, which is in short supply. The International Monetary Fund predicts there will be an unprecedented global contraction of 4.9 per cent in 2020. The economic shock triggered by COVID-19 hit the global economy at a time when it was already plagued by rising inequality in wealth and income, financial fragility and unsustainable debt burdens. The macroeconomic challenges are daunting, but we also know from previous crises that austerity, which damages economies and hurts the poorest the most, cannot be the answer.

As policymakers face up to the difficult issues ahead, perhaps one simple question can help to focus their minds. What is the economy for? If we could reorient the economy to be at the service of achieving economic and social rights for all, instead of GDP growth at any cost, then we would get very much closer to keeping the promises of the SDGs, and, with women and girls, build a more equal world. ●



© Mario Tama/Getty Images

Black Lives Matter and the Global Goals

The protests sparked by the death of George Floyd have shone a light on the human rights abuses still rife in even the most developed economies. In this Decade of Action, can we finally end racial inequality?

By **Rachel Pittman**, Executive Director, United Nations Association of the USA and **Sueann Tannis**, Senior Director, Integrated Communications, United Nations Foundation

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

These are just three articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(UDHR), adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

Yet, more than seven decades later, the United States of America, which played a leading role in the drafting of that milestone document, finds itself at the crossroads of a human rights crisis. Protestors have taken to the streets to demand equal dignity, rights, freedom, justice and peace for Black Americans, spurred by one too many senseless murders.

The names of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Mike Brown and others are now etched in the annals of a long, complex, hard-fought battle to fulfil the promise of

the UDHR to all people around the world – no less African Americans.

A Sustainable Development Agenda for all?

In addition to being a key figure in the process that gave us the Declaration of Human Rights, the US was also signatory to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda – "a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity". Adopted in 2015, it also

▲ Black Lives Matter protesters march in Los Angeles, California on the 57th anniversary of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr's historic "I have a dream" speech

holds a promise of ensuring that people, wherever they are in the world, can fulfil their potential with dignity, equality and in a healthy environment.

So why are Black Americans, citizens of one of the wealthiest nations on Earth, yet to realise this promise? Certainly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is not only for the Global South. And surely a country that historically has been at the forefront of the human rights agenda should be able to fix matters of equality and justice at home before attempting to do it abroad?

We wish it were true. We wish there were no need for a Black Lives Matter movement. But, sadly, there is. In 2020, after five centuries of struggle, the fight goes on. The time has come, however, when the gross violation of equal rights for people of colour in the US can no longer be ignored. It has never been clearer: human rights are not just a foreign problem for the US. It is also a domestic problem. It is why new movements and voices, new advocates supported by new allies have emerged, affirming the humanity of Black people and rejecting ‘narrow nationalism’ – as the Black Lives Matter movement calls it.

With sparks of an unrelenting uprising of international solidarity for equal rights for Black Americans igniting global conversations and agitation for an end to systemic and systematic oppression, the international community has to make new choices and new statements.

In June, the UN made its position clear when UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said: “The voices calling for an end to the killings of unarmed African Americans need to be heard. The voices calling for an end to police violence need to be heard. And the voices calling for an end to the endemic and structural racism that blights US society need to be heard.”

In many ways, her statement affirmed a key fact that needed to be laid bare: the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is not just for people in underdeveloped countries. This agenda is needed to address the unique challenges Black Americans face that too often have been forgotten and overlooked. It is time for their struggles, their needs and their human rights to be front and centre.

Bridging the gap between the Global Goals and Black Lives Matter

The question is: where do we go from here? What will it take to create lasting change and fulfil the promise of the Global Goals and the UDHR for Black America? A series of events and actions within the global development community are signals of hope.

The UN Human Rights Council in Geneva set up an urgent debate on racism, alleged police brutality and violence against protestors. UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed said: “This cause is at the heart of our organisation’s identity. Equal rights are enshrined in our founding Charter. Just as we fought apartheid years ago, so must we fight the hatred, oppression and humiliation today.” The Council also

The unprecedented momentum across communities, countries and people of all races for the full equality and dignity of the Black American should inspire hope

heard from the brother of George Floyd. “I am asking you to help us: Black people in America,” he told the Council.

In addition, African leaders in the UN who hold the rank of Under Secretary-General penned a poignant op-ed as the US witnessed a summer of protests, declaring: “To merely condemn expressions and acts of racism is not enough. We must go beyond and do more.”

Further, several institutions and think tanks have started the hard work of examining and fixing the colonial approach to development, where the fight against ‘global poverty’ ignores the ongoing scourge in the Global North, where decisions are made for – rather than by or with – those in the Global South, and where the lack of diversity and inclusion within these institutions needs to be addressed for true progress to be realised.

The United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA) is also

doubling down on its human rights work. This movement of Americans that supports the UN’s mission and the Sustainable Development Agenda is a long-time steward of the UDHR. But today that work is accelerated and more essential than ever.

The call for members to say something and do something has never been more urgent. Over the past few months, UNA-USA has been bringing together activists and advocates to use their voices, stories, ballots and liberties to call out injustice whenever they see it throughout the world – and across America in particular.

Hope for the journey ahead

The work has begun but it is far from over. The conversations and meetings now need to evolve into sustained agitation and action until there is lasting change. The global development community – at the highest levels – must tackle the issue head-on. The Black Lives Matter movement has made remarkable promise in just seven short years, but it needs multilateral action if the disruption it began in 2013 is to be fruitful.

The work to dismantle more than 500 years of injustice and oppression will be hard and complex. It will demand new ways of thinking, new voices, new actors and, in some cases, new leadership. But the unprecedented momentum across communities, countries and people of all races for the full equality and dignity of the Black American should inspire hope.

We cannot rest until the day comes when we will not need debates or protests to fight for freedom and equality in dignity and rights for Black people in America. Black boys and girls – from sea to shining sea – should not have to watch the world fighting for their right to life, liberty and security of person. And Black parents should be able to rest at night knowing that their sons and daughters will not be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in their homes or while on a trip to the store.

We should all be optimists and activists, determined to see the promise of the UDHR and the Sustainable Development Goals fulfilled for Black Americans in this generation. ●



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A crisis gone to waste?

Early hopes that the pandemic might shock the world into cleaner, greener, less wasteful economic models may have faded. Yet there is still time to ensure that COVID-19 is the springboard for transitioning to a circular economy

By **Tima Bansal**, Professor of Strategy, Ivey Business School, Western University

In March 2020, the world came to a grinding halt amid fears of widespread death and illness from COVID-19. Production and consumption slowed, and with them the waste that comes with industrial processes. For the first time in decades, the smog lifted in major cities. The journal *Nature* reported that global daily

carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions fell by 17 per cent in April 2020 compared with the same month the previous year. It argued that the planet's CO₂ profile could be changed permanently if governments retained their tight controls on carbon emissions.

But such optimism was misplaced. Just two months later, the same researchers publishing in *Nature* showed that CO₂ emissions had already increased to almost pre-pandemic levels. The National Oceanic

and Atmospheric Administration in the US revealed that total atmospheric carbon had risen, not fallen, over the year. In fact, at 414 parts per million (ppm) in June 2020, the carbon footprint would far exceed the 350 ppm hurdle necessary to “to protect

▲ Sakassou, Côte d'Ivoire. Children play in their new school buildings, constructed with bricks made from recycled plastic

young people, future generations and nature”.

Carbon emissions represent just one side of a multi-faceted waste profile, which includes emissions to land, air and water. Industrial pollution is once again filling the air, clogging waterways and toxifying the land. The urgency of the stresses is widely known, and was made explicit again by the WWF in its recent *Living Planet* report, which estimates that 68 per cent of wildlife has been lost in the last 50 years.

Building back the same

It seems that governments have let this crisis go to waste – literally. During the pandemic, countries worldwide pivoted within days to effectively shut down entire sections of their societies in a bid to halt coronavirus transmission. Then, in a panic to restart their stalled economies, governments mobilised vast amounts of money to stimulate production and consumption. Governments injected trillions of dollars into their economies, providing wage and rent subsidies, grants and loans. By 24 July, the US had spent 15 per cent of its annual GDP, and China 7 per cent, to reboot their economies.

But these incentives were not directed towards a ‘green restart’ that would help to ‘build back better’. The *Financial Times* reported that according to the Institute of International Finance, less than 1 per cent of stimulus money worldwide has been spent on a green recovery. Had the money indeed been used to build back better, the investment could have provided a springboard for sustainable development. It could have helped to stimulate commercial and industrial development that assured clean water, fewer emissions and improved biodiversity. Instead, the panic led governments to inject cash to ‘build back the same’.

Yet it was more important than ever for governments to stimulate a green restart, as the pandemic has been adding to ecological stressors. There is substantially more medical waste now being generated – approximately six times more than pre-pandemic levels – to ensure that spaces are disinfected and people are kept safe. Companies are holding more inventory, including perishables, to mitigate

supply-chain risks, which means even more waste. Nowhere is this more tragic than when it comes to livestock. According to Reuters, an Iowa farmer forced the abortion of 7,500 unborn piglets because the supply chain had dried up. Then there is the increase in packaging waste, as people are reluctant to visit shops and ordering more online, including their daily meals.

Industry is back, but so is waste.

Going circular

There is still time, however, to use this crisis to create a better world. Now that the panic has subsided, governments have an opportunity to invest future stimulus money for a green restart.

Over 80 per cent of products are designed so poorly that they will end up in waste streams often within just one year of being produced

So what does that look like? We need to move from a linear, take-make-waste economy to a circular economy, where material waste from production re-enters new production streams, not waste streams. Businesses need to redefine the byproducts of their production from waste to value.

Imagine food being delivered in cartons that are biodegradable – just like the food you have as leftovers. These materials can then biodegrade rapidly into soil, to refuel new plants. Imagine furniture and cars being designed for disassembly at the end of life, so the various parts can be reused in new furniture and new cars. A circular economy fuels not only the production process by finding value in waste, but assures clean air, water and land.

In this way, the linear model is replaced by a ‘make-use-make-use’ circular model that continues sustainably in perpetuity.

So what does a circular economy look like? Here are some important features.

New product design

In the linear model, products are designed to be thrown away, not reused or recycled. Over 80 per cent of products are designed so poorly that they will end up in waste streams often within just one year of being produced. This waste includes the clothes we wear, the electronics devices we use and the plastics that protect our food.

But products can be redesigned so they do not need to re-enter the waste stream. For example, Hewlett Packard’s Z1 workstation allows users to upgrade it by opening it up and swapping in new components without needing any tools. Building company Yorkon produces commercial building in modules, allowing them to be repurposed; an office space can be quickly reconfigured to a school.

New materials composition

Materials can be redesigned to be regenerated or remanufactured. Traditionally, juice cartons cannot be recycled because of the plastic and paper materials that are glued together to ensure the liquid does not leak. Yet Tetra Pak has produced a plant-based, fully renewable packaging for liquids that can be composted. Designer Kaye Toland has developed sanitary napkins that are also fully compostable. Biomaterials company Ecovative has designed packaging that replaces single-use plastics with mushrooms.

Renew, reuse, repair

Materials that are not easily renewed can be kept in the economy longer. For example, the idea of the ‘sharing economy’ is that fewer people need to own a product and that the same product can be used more often before it reaches the end of its life. Examples include communities sharing garden tools. Similarly, an increasing number of organisations are offering services instead of goods. Fashion company Rent the Runway allows customers the opportunity to rent clothing rather than buy it. Goods that are worn or broken can be fixed rather than discarded, such as clothing brand Patagonia’s Worn Wear scheme to repair their garments.

Green restart

Even though the initial shock of COVID-19 has passed and governments have already

spent much to restart the economy, there is still time and opportunity for countries to invest in a circular economy. Here are some ideas.

1. Tax waste. Waste is cheap. It is much easier and cheaper for corporations and civil society to dispose of what is not needed than to find another use because waste has no value. By putting a tax on waste, governments will create incentives for corporations to find alternative uses for it, stimulating a new economy for byproducts.

2. Incentivise green actions. Fiscal stimulus money (such as subsidies, tax relief, grants, loans) can be tied to corporate outcomes that show a clear commitment to a circular economy. A simple first step is for governments to simply ask companies to show green commitments and targets. A more significant step is to offer substantial incentives for new product or material design.

3. Share information. The circular economy is hampered by the lack of information, because companies are often not aware of unnecessary by-products. One company's waste could be another's feedstock, if information was more available. The government can play a significant role in incentivising the development of a platform technology in which organisations and civil society can share information about by-products.

4. Procure local and green. Most governments purchase a significant amount of materials for their operations, from building major infrastructure such as roads and hospitals to providing computers and desks in offices. The power governments wield through purchasing is substantial. By shifting their procurement practices from low-cost suppliers to include local and green criteria, governments can stimulate a tectonic shift towards the circular economy.

Although governments may have missed the opportunity to spend their stimulus money on a green recovery, there is still time to shift behaviour. Business and society are at a critical point. We can maintain a linear economy that will push society off an environmental cliff, or we turn around production into a circular economy that will embrace the principles of sustainable development. ●

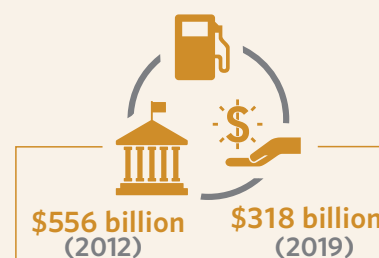
12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



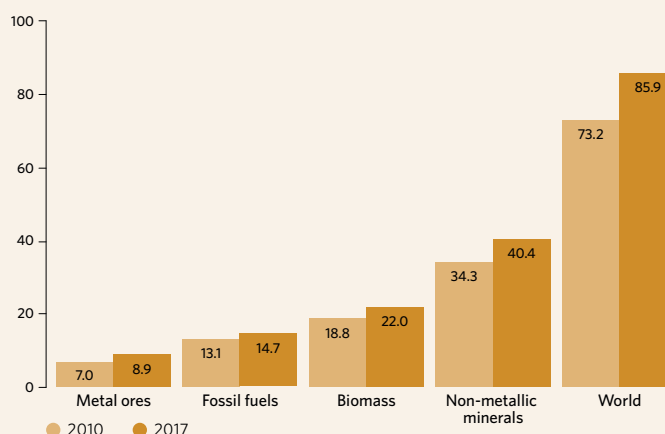
Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Target 12.c: Rationalise inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions

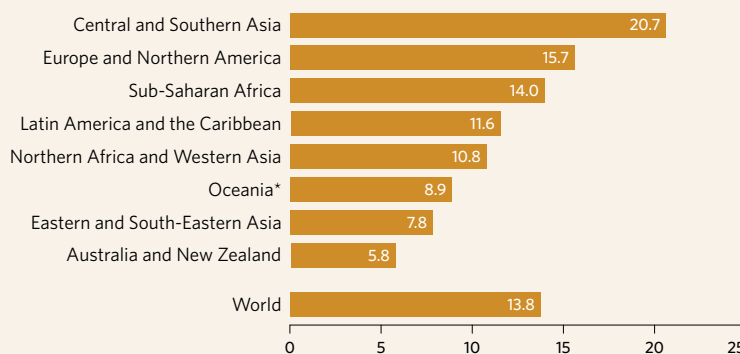
Fossil fuel subsidies remain high, contributing to the climate crisis. At \$318 billion in 2019, subsidies were \$120 billion lower than the previous year but largely due to lower average fuel prices



Material footprint by type of material, 2010 and 2017 (billions of metric tons)



Proportion of food lost, 2016 (percentage)



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Sources: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020/IEA



© WaterFrame/Alamy Stock Photo

Biodiversity for survival

Protecting biodiversity is not just about ethics. Prosperity depends on healthy, sustainable biosystems

By **Mathis Wackernagel**, President and Founder, Global Footprint Network

I am proud to be a sack of ocean water walking on land. After all, life started to evolve in our planet's oceans. Some life forms bagged up that water, added legs, and started to live on land. We, people, are descendants of these adventurous creatures. Our body contains physical memories of early evolution: it uses electrolytes and still takes advantage of membranes to regulate the exchange of nutrients and filter out

◀ The island of Misool in West Papua, Indonesia, is one of the richest locations on the planet for biodiversity and, as with other Pacific islands, faces severe risks from climate change and extreme weather

waste. Some people think that other planets necessarily are our next frontier. But they may forget that we, humans, are part of Earth, that our physiology reflects the very conditions that enabled life to emerge on this unique celestial body. Even our legs and the speed at which they swing evolved as a function of the particular gravitational force we experience on the surface of our planet. We are parts of the biosphere.

One biology

In short, we are biology. COVID-19 has powerfully reminded us of that fact – that we are indeed one biology. Our genetic codes are so profoundly related that the coronavirus can interact with all of us, wherever we live on this planet. The biosphere is our home and our host.

Being biology, of course, we depend on biodiversity. Even though we often consider ourselves as one, separate species, scientists have found over 10,000 species of mostly friendly microbes living in and on our bodies, collectively containing more than 300 times the number of human genes. In other words, even bodies are biodiversity.

The implications of being biology are profoundly practical. In short: biodiversity means self-preservation. Looking at the world from the biological vantage point makes any company, city or country's economic self-interest clear and obvious. The biological view recognises the flows of energy from ecosystems to animals, including people. Such flows come in the form of food, fibres, and other services. This view also makes obvious the importance of ecosystems to cope with our waste and to turn it back into resources.

The inescapable conclusion is that if we do not have a healthy life-support system, we put ourselves at risk. The lack of resource security undermines the ability of each and every underprepared country, city or company to operate.

It is no longer a secret that the human species is eroding its life-giving planet. Some scientists are calling our era the anthropocene: people have become the dominant geophysical force on the planet. In fact, the overuse becomes particularly evident once we analyse the planet as if it were a farm – because it is one. We can draw up a basic biological balance sheet and compare our demand on the planet with what our farm is able to renew. This is what Global Footprint Network's National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts do – based on about 15,000 data points from UN statistics, per country and per year.

What these accounts show is that humanity is using the biosphere faster than it can replenish – so fast that this year from 1 January to 22 August, or just 64 per cent of the year, the demand was as large as the total amount that all ecosystems combined can renew in the entire year. That's why 22 August was this year's Earth Overshoot Day. This is akin to using the resources of 1.6 Earths. If humanity as a whole lived like the residents of Luxembourg, a high-income country, on average, the date would have been 16 February.

It is possible to use more of nature than is being renewed as long as there are sufficient amounts of resource stocks (like forests, soils and groundwater) that we can deplete, and waste sinks (to absorb greenhouse gases from the atmosphere) that we can fill. But this overshoot does not work forever.

Nor is it ideal to aim for using the entire capacity of Earth for humans alone. The sole occupation of the entire Earth by humans would be a major threat to biodiversity. To maintain 85 per cent of the world's biodiversity, scientist and naturalist E.O. Wilson recommends that humanity only use half the planet's biocapacity, which would also be helpful from a climate-change perspective. This means the current human metabolism of 1.6 Earths is more than 3 times larger than the amount available from Wilson's Half-Earth perspective.

Given this quantitative mismatch, the first step to preserving our ecological integrity is to measure the scale of human presence in the biosphere. This is why Global Footprint Network keeps track of how much people

demand relative to what the planet's or each region's ecosystems can renew. Even if, ultimately, we want wonderful things like healthy ecosystems and abundant biodiversity, these goals cannot be achieved if the quantities mismatch. If the quantity of human demand exceeds regeneration, we cannot scale goals like healthy ecosystems and abundant biodiversity.

As long as the quantitative bottom-line condition of demanding less than what can be sustainably renewed is not met, quality cannot be scaled. For instance, assume that a forested area is harvested at double the rate at which it can be sustainably renewed. In this context, if we protect a portion of that forested area to preserve biodiversity, we will inevitably also put more pressure on biodiversity in the remaining area as long as human demand is not decreased. The demand just shifts. In other words, in a situation of overshoot, preserving one area comes at the expense of more pressure on the remaining areas. This means that biodiversity protection, in this example, can only be scaled across the entire forest area, if the basic quantitative condition of harvesting that forest below sustainable renewal rates is met.

This quantitative mismatch drives the loss of biological diversity in terrestrial, marine, and freshwater ecosystems all around the world, and the consequent deterioration of the ecological goods and services. More specifically, the loss of biodiversity is typically the result of one of five direct pressures or threats:

- habitat destruction, degradation and fragmentation;
- over-exploitation of wild-harvested species;
- invasive species;
- pollution;
- climate change.

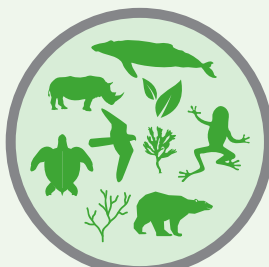
These direct threats to biodiversity arise from indirect drivers, all of which are contributors to ecological overshoot. Our massive overshoot puts many regions' resource security at risk, particularly if their local demand exceeds what their local ecosystems can renew and they do not have the financial means to procure those extra resources from somewhere else.

15 LIFE ON LAND



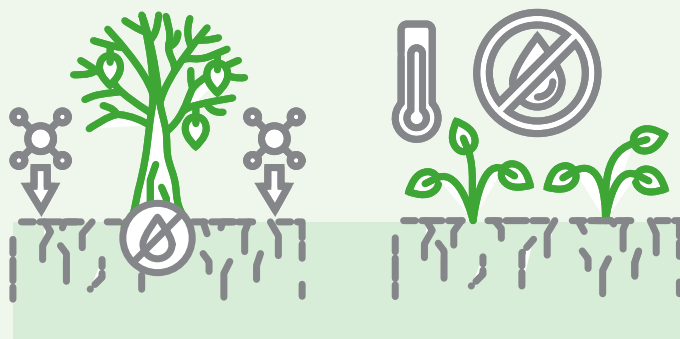
Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

The world is falling short on 2020 targets to halt biodiversity loss. Over **31,000 species** are threatened with extinction, which is **27%** of the assessed species in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red list



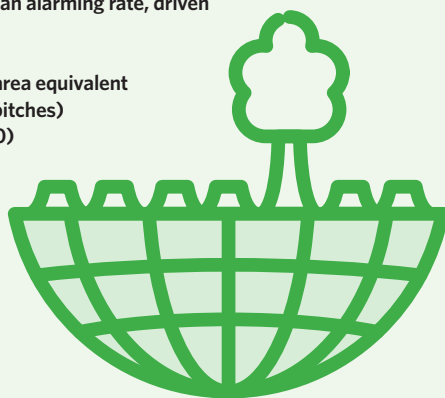
31,000 species

Two billion hectares of land on Earth are degraded, affecting some **3.2 billion** people, driving species to extinction and intensifying climate change



Forest areas continue to decline at an alarming rate, driven mainly by agricultural expansion

Each year, **10 million** hectares (an area equivalent to 14 million professional football pitches) of forest are destroyed (2015-2020)



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

Given this massive overuse, with climate change being one of the more prominent and widely discussed threats, the lackadaisical reaction of countries, cities and companies is surprising. To put it bluntly, if we recognise the emergency as a storm, it is mind-boggling to witness how many governments and companies nonsensically argue, “I will only fix my boat if others fix their boat first”. Yet that’s the predominant narrative in current climate negotiations. This narrative is self-defeating. Because in the absence of international agreements and collaboration, each entity bears even more risk and has an even higher incentive to prepare itself for the predictable future of climate change and resource constraints. As a passenger sitting in a car that’s getting dangerously off course, do you want to sit on the hood, or behind the steering wheel? Choose your future by design – don’t have it chosen by disaster.

Here is how: a biological approach that is comprehensive and recognises human dependence on the planet’s ecosystems enables us to see climate and biodiversity action as necessary rather than noble. The current climate debate is stuck in a noble argument (“it is our responsibility to humanity and the future”), leading to timid action. In reality, a country’s competitiveness and success depend on aggressive efforts to reduce resource dependence. Countries must prepare themselves for an inevitable carbon-free future, thereby strengthening their own resource security, and also supporting, as a side benefit, humanity’s sustainability.

Closing the gap between human demand and the Earth’s biological regenerative capacity (biocapacity) is necessary for both human long-term thriving as well as for maintaining biodiversity and ecological integrity. Actions and interventions to sustain the livelihoods of human populations and to conserve biodiversity at the same time depend on a two-pronged approach to increasing resource security: (i) reducing resource dependence across the globe and (ii) protecting ecosystems from destruction or degradation.

There is no other path if we want to maintain human prosperity. It is also the only path that ensures biological productivity and diversity are sustained. ●



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Hitting reset on sustainable energy

As COVID-19 underlines, energy can be the difference between life and death. We must rapidly ramp up progress to ensure everyone has access to this fundamental resource

By **Damilola Ogunbiyi**, CEO and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL), and Co-Chair of UN-Energy

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world as we know it. With business as usual being thrown out of the window, new opportunities are emerging that could pave the way to a more prosperous future for all.

This is particularly true for the energy transition. As countries continue to rebuild from the pandemic, clean-energy investment can support them to recover better, and use this unique moment to reset their economies and close energy access gaps.

Progress is desperately needed. Despite energy's critical role in catalysing economic development and supporting people's health and livelihoods, the world remains severely off track to achieve universal access to

affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all by 2030, as called for by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7.

Without electricity, people lack a basic necessity for poverty alleviation and the ability to build resilience to the global

▲ Living off-grid in a village near Mbour, Senegal. The villagers now benefit from high-quality solar homes systems

health crisis. Many are forced to cook with dirty fuels that further put them at risk of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

According to data from the latest *Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report 2020*, 789 million people globally still lack access to electricity and 2.8 billion people – over a third of the world's population – are unable to cook cleanly and safely.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, energy access saves lives. This further adds to the urgency and importance of faster progress in delivering sustainable energy for all.

But if current trends continue, we will not deliver the promise of universal energy access by 2030. We can no longer accept this incremental rate of progress. We must renew our commitment to an integrated energy transition that accelerates the pace of progress on access, prioritises energy efficiency and supports faster growth of renewables.

Meeting SDG 7 by 2030

If we look at the core targets of SDG 7 in more detail, we can see where the challenges and opportunities to accelerate progress are.

For example, on electrification, significant progress has been made since 2010, with the number of people without access to electricity reduced from 1.2 billion to 789 million in 2018. The decline was most significant in Central and Southern Asia, where the deficit shrank from 441 million in 2010 to 152 million in 2018.

The electricity access challenge remains heavily concentrated in Africa. The continent's share of world population without electricity access increased from 48 to 70 per cent between 2010 and 2018. We estimate that 565 million people still lack access to electricity across Africa. Beyond these numbers are millions more people in the region who only have minimal or unreliable access.

While electricity access can often dominate the headlines, the ongoing global challenge of access to clean cooking remains a major concern. Lack of political urgency or sustained investment, the absence of market-enabling conditions, and poor institutional frameworks have

hindered the development of the clean-cooking sector. If current trends persist, almost 30 per cent of the global population will still be without access to clean-cooking solutions by 2030.

Slow progress on energy efficiency is also undermining efforts towards all SDG 7 targets and carbon reduction. Since progress peaked in 2015, we've seen a continuing decline in the pace of progress on energy efficiency that is far from the 3 per cent rate of annual improvement required each year. This target remains within reach, but coordinated efforts are needed between governments and partners to double annual investment in energy efficiency by 2025, and double it again between 2025 and 2040,

The next few years will be critical if we're to deliver an energy transition that is truly inclusive, equitable and leaves no one behind

according to analysis by the International Energy Agency.

To encourage this investment, countries and organisations need to make public commitments – for example, through nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement and cross-sector energy compacts like the Three Percent Club on energy efficiency – to support the implementation of energy efficiency economy-wide.

Renewable energy has made exciting progress over recent years, but a renewable revolution is still to be fully realised. For example, decentralised renewable solutions that will be essential for providing energy access to millions are not being deployed fast enough, and renewable energy uptake is only moving at a moderate pace.

With the urgency of the climate crisis being felt globally, countries should focus on accelerating integrated and comprehensive energy policies that support greater uptake of modern renewables for electricity, heat and the transport sector.

This is our reset moment

Now, as the world continues to deal with the ongoing and growing impacts of COVID-19, countries have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to recover better and accelerate their energy transition.

This is a significant opportunity for those nations with large access gaps. According to SEforALL's Recover Better with Sustainable Energy series, countries that commit to an ambitious recover-better strategy can deliver long-term economic growth, new jobs and sustainable energy for all in the long term.

Investing in clean energy could unleash a wave of new jobs. As the global economy is increasingly being powered by clean and efficient sources of energy, research shows that dollar-for-dollar investments in clean energy create three times the number of jobs compared with fossil fuels. Every 1,000 customers connected to decentralised energy solutions – like solar home systems or solar mini grids – support approximately 25 jobs.

Countries will also see improved health, agricultural and gender outcomes, helping to ensure that women and girls benefit from a green recovery. A gender-sensitive approach is particularly key as research shows wages for women with access to energy are 59 per cent higher than those without.

By acting on the enabling measures put forward in our Recover Better series – including investing in energy efficiency, setting roust policies, eliminating fossil-fuel subsidies and declaring a moratorium on coal-fired power plants – countries will benefit from increased GDP, affordable energy provision and improved agriculture, gender and health outcomes.

Crucially, this reset can also spark progress at the speed and scale needed to meet SDG 7 and help put the global economy on a trajectory in line with the Paris Agreement and the entire SDGs.

In this moment we must also redefine what we consider energy access to be. For too long, people have seen it simply as the ability to turn on a light. Yet energy access cannot just be considered in terms of a minimum level of access. We must also ensure it provides energy for development, for productive use and economic

opportunity – helping millions of people live dignified, healthy and prosperous lives.

We need a Decade of Action

2020 marks the beginning of the final Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs. With ambitious action we can still achieve SDG 7 by 2030. But the next few years will be critical if we're to deliver an energy transition that is truly inclusive, equitable and leaves no one behind. That is why SEforALL, through our new business plan, is focused on moving beyond advocacy to action by prioritising data-driven decision-making, partnerships with high-impact countries and implementation on the ground.

To help galvanise action, the UN General Assembly has called for a High-level Dialogue on Energy to be held in 2021. This will be the first high-level meeting on energy mandated by the General Assembly in over four decades and will provide the global community with a pivotal moment for increasing action and ambition towards SDG 7 goals.

SEforALL, along with the UN Development Programme and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, will lead this work, including the development of new energy compacts and multi-stakeholder partnerships that aim to accelerate a universal energy transition and access. Ahead of crucial global climate talks in Glasgow, this will be a critical moment on the international calendar for countries, businesses and key stakeholders to raise ambition.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, progress to meet universal energy access was too slow. Now COVID-19 risks derailing even the progress we have seen unless we act immediately. If we go back to business as usual, and if current trends continue, we will not deliver the promise of universal energy access.

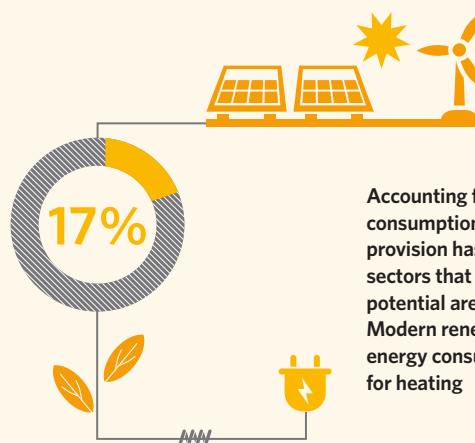
The benefits of investing in sustainable energy are clear: a demonstrable return on investment, a more resilient economy, healthier people and a cleaner environment. Today's decisions will impact tomorrow's ability to recover better over the long term. We must hit 'reset' and seize this moment to realise our promise of sustainable energy for all. ●

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



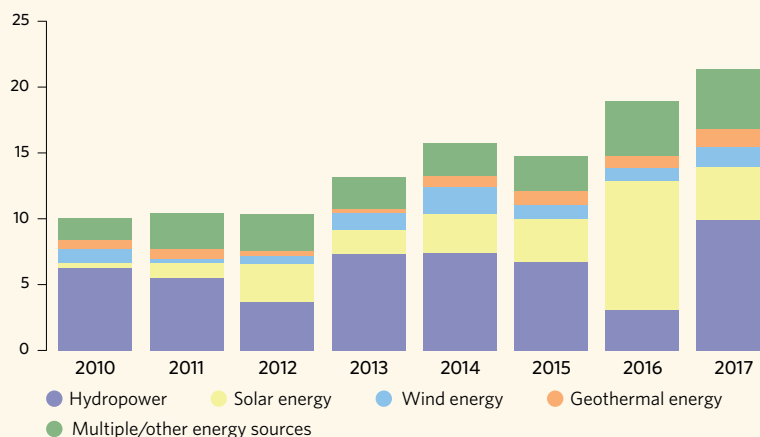
Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Energy access needs to be improved: in 2018, **789 million** still had no electricity



Accounting for only **17%** of total energy consumption in 2017, renewable energy provision has to be accelerated. Two end-use sectors that currently lag far behind their potential are transportation and heating. Modern renewables made up just **3.3%** of energy consumed for transport and **9.2%** for heating

International financial flows to developing countries in support of clean and renewable energy by type of technology, 2010 - 2017 (billions of dollars at 2017 prices and exchange rates)



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020



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Protecting the rights to water and sanitation

The first decade of human rights to water and sanitation has brought good progress to the sector. At the same time, the pandemic underlines the need for clean water and sanitation for human well-being – and where that need is still not being met. We must do more to ensure the human rights to water and sanitation translate into leaving no one behind

By **Alejandro Jiménez**, Director, Water and Sanitation, Stockholm International Water Institute

The year 2020 is an important one for the human rights to water and sanitation. It marks the 10th anniversary of the UN General Assembly declaration that recognised these rights. It's also the start of the mandate of the third UN Special Rapporteur on this issue, after 12 years of work by previous Special Rapporteurs. What have we learnt during this time?

First, the recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation has moved the debate from the discussion of whether they should be considered rights, to the 'implementation' of those rights. This has been achieved through: advancing the formal and legal recognition of the rights at both national level and in international forums; by different actors and agencies recognising the rights, defining the different elements and challenges associated with the rights; and, ultimately, advancing the fulfilment of the rights. Significant progress has been made on all these fronts.

Today, some 40 countries recognise the human right to water in their constitution. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, while not explicitly mentioning the rights to water and sanitation, has a clear focus on universality with its ambition to leave no one behind. Many aspects of the human rights, though not all, have been included in the formulation of the SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation for all) targets and indicators.

The work of the Special Rapporteurs during the last 12 years, including 23 country visits, 22 thematic reports and countless sessions, keynotes and webinars, have greatly contributed to the understanding and dissemination of the human rights to water and sanitation. NGOs, civil society, bilateral donors and UN organisations have largely

embraced the rights in their language and worked on how to implement them through their operations.

At the same time, the rights are nowadays recognised by water utilities, both public and private, and multiple guidelines and manuals have been developed in this regard. In addition, during the last 10 years, the levels of basic access to water and sanitation have increased substantially, as the UNICEF/World Health Organization Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) shows. Can we then be satisfied and declare the human rights to water and sanitation as on their way

Coronavirus has shown the importance of water as a key ingredient in hand hygiene, which has been among the main prevention measures in the first phase of the pandemic

to being fulfilled? Not yet, it seems, as there are a few aspects that need further attention.

First, sanitation has been historically neglected, both in terms of formal recognition and in practice. While the Millennium Development Goal on water was fulfilled, the one on sanitation was not. In the last global assessment in 2017, the JMP estimated that 71 per cent of the global population used safely managed drinking water services, while only 45 per cent of the global population used safely managed sanitation services. In 2015, sanitation was declared as a separate right, to avoid being neglected, but much more focus is still needed to close the gap.

Second, recognition of the rights at national level per se does not necessarily lead to the realisation of those rights for the population. Recent research (from Langford, Schiel and Wilson, published in the journal *Water*) shows that constitutional recognition of the right to water alone is not enough

to expect higher rates of access to water, and that recognition of the right needs to be coupled with democratic governance (characterised as 'rule of law' and 'degree of civil-society participation') to make a difference. The recent follow-up reports of the Special Rapporteur country visits also show low levels of implementation of the recommendations provided, particularly those that require more structural changes at national level, such as legal or financing aspects.

Third, enhancing accountability, eliminating discrimination towards certain groups and improving equality in service delivery deserve more attention, as the recommendations given by successive Special Rapporteurs to countries during their country visits show (Heller, L.; De Albuquerque, C.; Roaf, V.; Jiménez, A. in *Water 2020*). Groups such as ethnic minorities, indigenous people, homeless, refugee, and internally displaced people and migrant workers frequently suffer from discrimination. COVID-19 has only confirmed this.

At the same time, most of the responsibilities for water and sanitation service delivery lie at the local level. In many cases, local actors have limited resources and capacities to take on the responsibility of either providing or controlling an adequate level of service to fulfil the rights. There are still many problems we need to address, including lack of regulation, limited access to information, lack of mechanisms to oversee and enforce the adequate use of resources, limited civic space, and lack of consumer protection mechanisms.

Building forward better, post-pandemic
COVID-19 presents an immense challenge to our global society, but also offers opportunities to underline the importance of basic services in general, including water and sanitation. Coronavirus has shown the importance of water as a key ingredient in hand hygiene, which has been among the main prevention measures in the first phase of the pandemic.

This recognition of the importance of water has enabled a number of short-term measures in many aspects of water and sanitation service

◀ Handwashing at a Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH) WASH water project in Puware Shikhar, Nepal. Handwashing with soap has long been central to protecting health, reducing the incidence of diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections, which now includes COVID-19

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



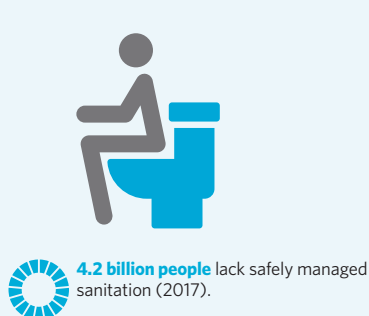
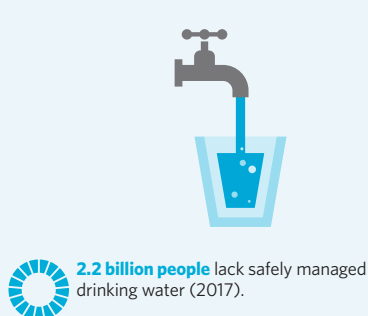
Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

3 billion people worldwide lack basic handwashing facilities at home, the most effective method for COVID-19 prevention

The problem is most severe in sub-Saharan Africa, where 75% of the population (767 million people) lack basic handwashing facilities, followed by Central and Southern Asia at 42% (807 million people), and Northern Africa and Western Asia at 23% (116 million people).

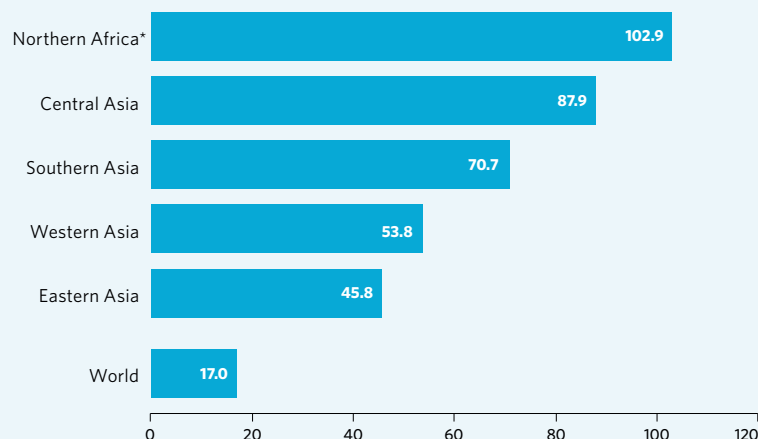


Despite progress, billions still lack water and sanitation services



Levels of water stress (freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources), subregions with high and very high water stress, 2017 (percentage)

If unmitigated, water stress can lead to water scarcity, which could displace an estimated 700 million people by 2030.



*A score in excess of 100 means the region is extracting unsustainably from existing aquifer sources and/or produces a large share of water from desalinisation.

Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

delivery. Governments have ordered the reconnection of customers to water supplies that had been previously disconnected due to lack of payment. They have provided subsidies to those most in need and have forbidden any new water supply disconnections. And they have put in place extraordinary measures to deliver water to the people that were not connected to a piped water supply network, not least with the collaboration of international organisations, NGOs, civil society and through people's solidarity at large. In addition, many water and sanitation utilities have advanced years in terms of

The short-term response has shown that a lot is possible, given the impetus

how to work remotely, improve supply chains and establish online payment systems and customer complaint mechanisms. The short-term response has shown that a lot is possible, given the impetus.

But there are important threats on the horizon. Many of the emergency measures taken by governments and utilities were done provisionally, without a clear plan on how to finance them. They were mostly focused on the people served through formal channels (for example, piped water) and those that already had access to social protection. So they did not reach all of the population in need. Meanwhile, utilities and other service providers are seeing a large drop in revenue at the same time as increased costs due to the exceptional efforts to increase service delivery during the pandemic.

As COVID-19 continues to hit society and the economy, there will be competing demands on how to use scarce government funds to enable recovery. Keeping in mind that adequate access to water and sanitation is a fundamental part of the strategy to fight this pandemic (and others to come) will help us to give water and sanitation the long-term priority they need. It will also allow us to start the second decade of the human rights to water and sanitation with renewed hope. ●



© Russell Watkins/Department for International Development

Aid transformed

Global crises – and goals – are increasingly undermining the traditional notion of countries as either rich aid donors or poor recipients. How might a new model of ‘global public investment’ rewrite the rules?

By **Jonathan Glennie**, independent writer and researcher on international cooperation

I was asked to write an article about ‘aid’, but the time for aid is over. It has done some good, some bad, in its long life (beginning in its modern form after the Second World War). But it is now an outdated and insufficient approach to achieving the Global Goals outlined in Agenda 2030.

Don’t get me wrong: we need plenty of international public money, much more than we currently have from official development assistance (ODA) and South–South cooperation. The private sector, while always a welcome partner, has not ridden to the rescue as some rather despairingly hoped a few years ago. And anyway, the idea that private money could replace public money has always been spurious. No one would say that at the national level, so why

argue it when it comes to international development? The two types of money are fundamentally different, yet both are needed – today and permanently.

▲ A paediatric nurse from the UK at a clinic set up to treat a diphtheria outbreak in a Rohingya refugee camp near Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. This type of aid in response to humanitarian crises helps strengthen public support for aid in donor countries but also has the negative effect of reinforcing counterproductive, donor-recipient stereotypes, particularly the ‘saviour complex’

Nor will domestic resources in low and middle-income countries suddenly, magically, increase to meet the demands of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly given the mega economic hit the whole world is expecting on account of COVID-19. When people say that calling for more international public spending is unrealistic, one can only respond that waiting for private and domestic resources to fill the gaps in spending is even more so. And one can point to any number of ‘unrealistic’ policies now being implemented because the world finds itself in emergency mode.

Joseph P. Overton’s famous window of political acceptability is now well and truly open, and the sunlight is flooding in. This provides a context for a transformational new approach to concessional, international public finance for sustainable development. Not aid, but global public investment (GPI).

This new approach would maintain the best of aid: public money directed at some of the world’s greatest problems, particularly poverty. But it would ditch the rest: the patronising us-and-them narrative, the exclusionary decision-making processes. You cannot take the politics out of international finance, and you cannot magic away the technical difficulties in supporting objectives with many stakeholders in complex contexts. But you can overhaul the structures within which money is gathered and spent. That is what the GPI approach seeks to do.

Paradigm shifts

So what does GPI mean, and how would it differ from aid? I suggest five major paradigm shifts to underpin the next 50 years of financial development cooperation.

First, we need to raise our ambitions. Aid has been primarily intended to reduce poverty, both individual and national. But this focus, while important, has led to an incredibly stingy understanding of human obligations, as if the job of international solidarity is done when minimum (very low) welfare standards are met. The challenge of eradicating extreme poverty remains but, today, tackling inequality and enabling all countries to converge with relatively high living standards is a bolder aim, in line with the world’s new global objectives, the SDGs.

Second, we need to be done with this sleight of hand around public, private and blended finance. With higher ambitions, even so-called ‘middle income’ countries are far too poor to deliver on the promise of the SDGs – we are going to need serious topping up from wealthier nations. Private money is welcome, as is philanthropy.

But the job of building back better is for governments accountable to citizens – you cannot replace public money.

Foreign aid has traditionally been considered nothing more than a stopgap, necessary only in exceptional circumstances to fill a shortfall in a country’s finances. As other types of finance become available, this temporary support comes to an end.

in wealthier countries). Some will see this as a radical idea, but it is increasingly the new normal. Many countries are today both contributors and recipients of development finance, including the one I live in, Colombia. The GPI proposal is not only a call to action, it is also simply a better description of today’s reality.

Clearly, at any moment of change, there will be forces trying to drive us in a less progressive, more nationalist direction. We must make sure that any changes we implement for international public finance do not undermine what we currently know as ODA or aid but are additional to it.

This links closely to the fourth paradigm shift, on how global public money should

The causes of poverty, inequality and unsustainability are structural, and it is impossible for international public money alone to make a real difference in the absence of policies to transform the economy and society, nationally and globally

But a system of GPI would not just be a last resort, but a first resort (in the words of economist Mariana Mazzucato), prodding societies in the right direction and promoting global benefits.

Changes in global wealth and power have shaken up international development practice for the better, with emerging economies now contributing more than ever to global objectives, even as they continue to receive financial support. This makes no sense in the current ‘aid’ paradigm, which splits the world into rich countries – ‘donors’ – and poor countries – ‘recipients’ – but is a fundamental element of the new approach we propose.

The third mega paradigm shift is that all countries, even the very poorest, should contribute funds for global sustainable development according to their ability to do so. Likewise, all countries, even some rich nations, could receive funds according to need (just as the European Union ensures that most of its pooled funds go to poorer countries, but some go to poorer regions

be managed. While aid has often been a force for good, it has also been misused and wasted, in part due to the institutions and processes through which it is managed. Aid governance is stuck in the 20th century, with a handful of countries taking the major decisions and contributions fluctuating depending on ‘donor’ circumstances. At this time of flux, there is a moment of opportunity to reorder the way the world manages development cooperation. An improved system of GPI requires more democratic decision-making about the size, purpose and accountability of contributions.

We need to move away from a donor–recipient mentality and towards more horizontal partnerships with all countries and other stakeholders (including civil society) sat at the decision-making table.

The final paradigm shift is in how we talk about development cooperation. Words matter. They can convey respect or condescension – and too often in the world of ‘aid’ it is the latter, something emphasised by those calling for the ‘decolonisation’ of

development, emboldened by the powerful Black Lives Matter movement. The commonly used language of the aid sector is outdated, misleading the public, patronising recipients and entrenching an embarrassing 'saviour complex'. A new vision for GPI must be accompanied by a narrative more appropriate to today's reality. Global spending on global goods and services is not charity but a sensible investment in mutually beneficial objectives (just like public sector spending at the national level).

In part because of the way the pandemic has sharpened the consequences of inaction, this idea is seeing growing support from all over the world and from a variety of political standpoints. Economist Jayati Ghosh calls the GPI approach "a necessary element to deal with the challenges we face". According to human rights lawyer and global health scholar Gorik Ooms, "global social justice is the ultimate global public good. We need global public investment to make global social justice happen." Lysa John, Secretary-General of CIVICUS (the global alliance of civil society) says: "rethinking aid as a global public investment is critical if we are to secure our undeniably interdependent future". For Harpinder Collacott, Executive Director of Development Initiatives, "GPI is an idea whose time has come."

Part of the puzzle

Spending more public money, more effectively, is not the only thing needed to support development internationally. Far from it. The causes of poverty, inequality and unsustainability are structural, and it is impossible for international public money alone to make a real difference in the absence of policies to transform the economy and society, nationally and globally. So it is important not to overclaim for what GPI will be able to achieve. It is just a piece of the puzzle. But it is an important piece.

While wishing tech billionaires the very best as they work up plans to send people off to live on Mars, we would not want, and can not expect, them to deliver goals closer to home. Global public investment should become a mainstay of our collective efforts to build back better, making our own planet a fairer, safer, greener and healthier home. ●

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

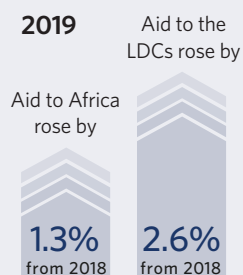


Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

Remittances to low- and middle-income countries – an economic lifeline for many poor households – are projected to fall



2019

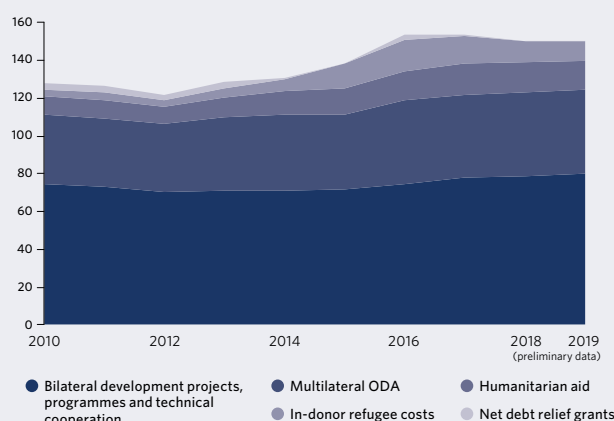


NET ODA totalled \$147.4 billion in 2019, almost unchanged from 2018, but aid to Africa rose by 1.3% from 2018 and aid to the least developed countries (LDCs) rose by 2.6% from 2018

2020



Components of net ODA flows, 2010-2019, billions of dollars



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020



© Andrea Sabbadini/Alamy Stock Photo

Heads, hearts and hands

Achieving Agenda 2030 requires us all to have the knowledge, skills and desire to take action to live our lives more sustainably

By **Stefania Giannini**, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

Most of us did not predict the change that 2020 has wreaked. Coronavirus has infected tens of millions globally, taking a huge toll on human life. It has caused unprecedented disruptions to our societies, threatening progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2030 Agenda, as well as the nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of global common goods, including science, information, the environment and, my field, education. School closures due to the crisis have affected more than 90 per cent of the world's

◀ Students march in Rome as part of the global climate strike, 'Fridays For Future'

student population in over 190 countries, exacerbating inequalities in access to education and learning, especially for the most vulnerable. UNESCO estimates that 24 million learners will not find their way back to school in 2020.

Why education is vital to Agenda 2030

Global problems require global solutions – and education empowers learners to create these solutions. Education is much more than giving learners access to knowledge and skills to find jobs. What, how and where we learn impacts our ideas, capabilities and behaviours – and this has unparalleled potential for the transformation of societies. Governments around the world have recognised this by placing education at the heart of action needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda and prevent the climate crisis.

The United Nations family has also made education central to efforts to achieve the SDGs. The right to education is enshrined in SDG 4, which aims to ensure quality education for all. In 2019, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed that education for sustainable development (ESD) was not only an integral part of SDG 4, but also a key enabler of all 17 SDGs. This is clear in target 4.7, which aims for all learners to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development by 2030. As this shows, ESD is a springboard for development, and a driver for human dignity and freedom.

In April 2020, as COVID-19 took hold in many countries, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called upon governments to 'build back better', using the pandemic as an opportunity to reorient our actions towards avoiding the climate crisis. ESD must be central to these efforts – and UNESCO, with its mandate centred on education, leads this charge.

ESD is a lifelong learning process that empowers learners with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to make informed decisions and take responsible action for

protecting the environment. As COVID-19 has shown, humans and nature are inextricably linked. To build a better world, we need to acknowledge this relationship and learn how to live in greater harmony with the environment, with a view to creating more peaceful and sustainable societies.

ESD is vital not only because it raises awareness of the SDGs, but also because it helps learners understand these goals, ensuring that they have the capabilities to make changes in the world. This means that learners are better equipped all round. Their heads have the knowledge and skills to collaborate, solve complex problems, and think systemically and creatively. Their hearts are filled with passion and a shared sense of responsibility. And their hands are ready and willing to take action. With their heads, hearts and hands in the right place, they can act accordingly.

ESD progress to date

With ESD in mind, the UN General Assembly designated 2005 to 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Following up on these efforts, UNESCO launched the Global Action Programme on ESD in 2015, as a way of scaling up action at all levels and in all areas of the education sector.

Much progress has been made. Students, teachers, schools, policymakers, civil-society actors and governments have worked with us to move towards education that includes and prioritises sustainable development. In UNESCO's monitoring report for 2012 to 2016, 70 of 83 countries – 92 per cent – reported that the implementation of topics related to what subsequently became SDG 4.7 had improved. A UNESCO report presented at COP25 in 2019 showed that almost all countries reviewed include education in their efforts to implement the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement, to varying degrees.

Evidence of this progress can be seen around the world. Kenya, for instance, has adopted an ESD policy and rolled it out across the country's education system. Costa Rica's new national education policy recognises sustainable development as one of

its key components. Germany has established a national platform on ESD, which brings together high-level representatives across sectors to promote ESD throughout the German education system.

However, many countries have also reported that they face obstacles due to a lack of financial, technical and human resources, among other issues. UNESCO monitoring has shown that progress is required in relation to teacher training and education outside the school system, as well as in integrating these learning approaches in student assessment. Joint monitoring with UNFCCC has demonstrated that we are overly reliant on cognitive and content-based learning over socio-emotional and behavioural education, which is crucial for empowering learners.

To address these issues and map the way forward, the 40th session of UNESCO's General Conference adopted a resolution on 'Education for Sustainable Development: Towards achieving the SDGs', or 'ESD for 2030', in November 2019. In 2020, UNESCO is launching the resolution's new framework and roadmap – because the world needs better policies, better learning environments and more empowered teachers, so that young people can actively work towards a more sustainable world.

Uncertain path

As the world looks to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become evident that there is no clear path back to 'normal'. We have much work to do in the next decade to curtail the negative impact of the pandemic, without losing sight of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Because when it comes to climate change, we have no time to lose.

Instead, this is an opportunity to rethink our actions for the future of the planet. We must build ESD into the 'new normal', and ensure that its emphasis on knowledge, awareness and action for sustainability is built into education systems worldwide – including solutions for distance learning.

Education gives students the building blocks they need to construct the future. Together, we must ensure that what we learn reflects the world we want to create. ●



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We must change how we live

The pandemic is yet another warning sign of humanity living at odds with the resources of our planet. Either we follow a new path to a sustainable future, or nature will change it for us

By **Inger Andersen**, Executive Director,
UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

Each year for the last three decades, the Global Footprint Network has been tracking Earth Overshoot Day – the day when humanity’s demand for natural resources and services exceeds what the Earth can regenerate in that year.

In 2019, Earth Overshoot Day came on 31 July, the earliest ever, as humanity’s hunger for natural resources grew. This year, a fall in consumption due to pandemic

◀ **Shea butter production process near Chiana, Ghana.** Shea trees act as a buffer against desertification, are a resilient source of food and generate export income. Equally valuable, the shea butter industry is dominated by women, creating employment, independence and security

lockdowns moved the date back to 22 August. Good news? Not exactly. At a time of global recession and belt tightening, humanity still needs 1.6 planets to sustain it.

Something is seriously wrong with how our economies and societies operate. We need to use the pandemic recovery to build back better – which means putting nature at the heart of every economic decision and ensuring that humanity only takes what the planet can afford to give.

Crisis of production and consumption

Our way of life has caused the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, damaging the health of people and planet. We see it in the current pandemic, which is linked to the loss of nature. We see it in the wildfires that are becoming increasingly frequent across the globe. We see it in the millions of people who die each year from air pollution.

The key culprit for this crisis is unsustainable resource use. Research from the International Resource Panel (IRP) shows that in 2017, natural resource extraction and processing accounted for around half of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and significant global biodiversity loss and water stress.

Patterns of consumption are changing with globalisation, outsourcing and economic growth, but the overall trend remains upwards. A 'historical trends' scenario on natural resource use developed by the IRP shows that without remedial action by 2060 we can expect material use to more than double to 190 billion tonnes, GHG emissions to increase by 43 per cent, industrial water withdrawal to increase by up to 100 per cent, and agricultural land to increase by 20 per cent – reducing forests by 10 per cent and natural habitat by around 20 per cent.

This scenario assumes the continuation of historical trends in population growth, per-

capita economic growth, material intensity of economic activity, rates and patterns of urbanisation, technological change within sectors and climate policy outcomes.

This vision of the future is undoubtedly grim, but we have the power to ensure it does not come to pass. We already have a global roadmap to follow in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement and other international agreements. Our job, in the wake of the pandemic, is to follow this roadmap towards just and inclusive economic models that protect nature and the world's poor and vulnerable.

Shunning traditional growth measures

A key step in supporting this roadmap is an urgent rethink of how we track growth and prosperity. Yes, we have targets on sustainability, biodiversity, climate change and land degradation neutrality in the global roadmap. Natural resources are within the scope of many of the SDGs. But, at the national level, GDP does not account for damage to nature, the impacts of climate change and pollution – despite over half of the world's GDP being dependent on nature.

We can see the narrow focus on GDP growth during the pandemic. Headlines are focused on GDP falling as consumption, the engine that drives modern economies, falters. A lot of stimulus measures are focused on getting consumption going again. This is understandable. People have lost their jobs and many more will do so as businesses fail. They need to be protected. But simply restarting the consumption engine will only bring bigger crises in the future. Wasteful consumption contributes to biodiversity loss, climate change and pandemics like COVID-19.

Measuring and managing the health of nature and the climate, and incorporating necessary changes in the compass of progress are therefore key. This is where indicators such as the Inclusive Wealth Index (IWI) can be so important. The IWI looks at three types of capital – produced, human and natural – showing nations how their economic decisions impact the planet. For example, in the last Inclusive

Wealth report, UNEP found that natural capital globally was falling at 0.7 per cent each year, even while produced and human capital grew.

We need to shift to the IWI, or something similar, as the primary indicator of economic progress. The UK's independent global review of the economics of biodiversity, led by Sir Partha Dasgupta, makes this point. The interim report, issued earlier this year, calls for an acknowledgement that the human economy is embedded within nature. It points to the need to look beyond GDP to recognise the limits nature places on the economy and reshape our understanding of sustainable economic growth.

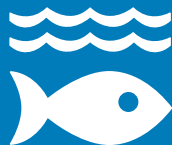
Reducing resource demand through decoupling

The ultimate goal is to decouple natural resource use and environmental impacts from economic activity. As Professor Dasgupta says, this means asking ourselves difficult questions on what and how we consume and how we manage our waste.

Some resource efficiency measures can bring both resource consumption and emissions down. To give a specific example, designing houses with lighter, low-carbon materials and more efficient use of space can, by 2050, reduce emissions from the construction, operation and deconstruction of homes by up to 40 per cent in the G7 and 70 per cent in China and India.

Decoupling will not happen spontaneously. Governments need to create well-designed and well-funded policy packages – both in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic and longer term. This means proper targets and indicators, national plans for sustainable resource use, and incentives, regulations and investments in the circular economy. It means taking advantage of 'leapfrogging' opportunities in countries or regions that are not yet locked into long-term carbon-intensive infrastructure – new infrastructure should be resilient and work with nature, not against it. And it also means making businesses understand that their future profitability depends on sustainable use of resources.

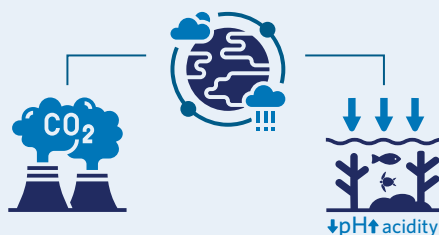
14 LIFE BELOW WATER



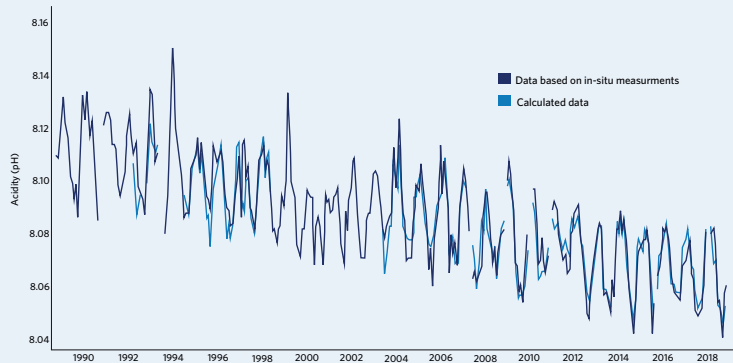
Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Ocean acidification continues to threaten marine environments and ecosystems services

A 100-150% rise in ocean acidity is projected by 2100, affecting half of all marine life

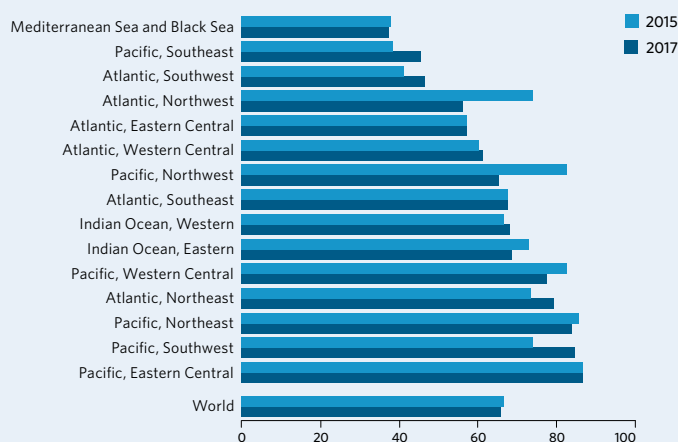


In recent decades, ocean acidification has been occurring 100 times faster than during natural events over the past 55 million years. These rapid chemical changes are an added pressure on marine ecosystems



Source: European Environment Agency. Data originate from the Aloha station pH time series, adapted from Dore, J.E., 2009

Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels, by marine region, percentage



Source: Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

Support to vulnerable sectors in a resource transition

Such moves will inevitably entail phasing out certain industries and sectors, particularly those built around fossil fuels. This is where much of the resistance to change lies. When communities see their job prospects disappearing, they are understandably unlikely to support an economic shift. The UK knows this all too well. The decline of the coal industry in the 1980s led to massive social upheaval and poverty for many towns dependent upon it.

We can look to Vietnam to see what is possible. Solar power was limited there only three years ago. Then the government offered to pay \$93.5 for every megawatt hour produced by big solar farms if they started operations before the end of June 2019. By 2019, investors had pumped in enough money to install capacity of over five gigawatts, or 44 per cent of Southeast Asia's total solar capacity. Hope is now growing that this solar boom will continue, displacing planned coal plants in Vietnam and the wider region – and, of course, providing jobs.

This example clearly shows that governments and the private sector will play a pivotal role in the green transition, with policies and incentives encouraging new opportunities that transform economies. It also shows that change, when it comes, can be lightning quick. Many expect to see even greater movement in the EU. By 2030, the EU is expected to mobilise around €150 billion under the Green Deal's Just Transition Mechanism to help its regions still most reliant on carbon-intensive industries shift to greener options.

We now have the perfect combination of factors to make these kinds of systemic shifts. The pandemic has given us a motivating warning: if we do not change how we live voluntarily, nature will do it for us in a way we will not like. We have never had a better understanding of the problems we face. We have never had more solutions to these problems. We have never had such high levels of public and political support for change. This is our biggest chance yet to shift our economies and societies back into harmony with nature. We must not waste it.●

A blueprint for sustainable food

Origin Green is improving sustainability across all dimensions of Ireland's food supply chain.

By Deirdre Ryan

Origin Green is Ireland's food and drink sustainability programme, established by Bord Bia (The Irish Food Board) in 2012. It is driving sustainability improvements across the entire supply chain from farmers to manufacturers, to food service and retailers.

Recognising that Origin Green was uniquely placed to play a pivotal role in helping the Irish food and drink industry deliver meaningful contributions to the advancement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its associated targets, the programme continues to evolve to advance this global agenda.

Many of Ireland's food and drink producers and dedicated farmers are eight years into their Origin Green journey. The key benefits of the programme are more environmentally aware farms, an important focus on community and enhanced sustainable food and drink production, which ultimately contribute to sustainable livelihoods.

Since its inception, Origin Green has grown to collaborate with 53,000 farms and 330 leading Irish food and drink companies. Providing programmes for farmers, manufacturers and retailers, Origin Green is independently monitored and verified at every stage. Members of Origin Green account for 90% of Ireland's food and drink exports and 70% of its domestic retailers.

Commitment to the SDGs

Over the past five years, all members have achieved significant results and the programme's critical focus on proof and progress provides strong foundations for facing the challenges of the future. Over 260,000 carbon assessments have taken place on beef and dairy farms over this period. Origin Green's Progress Update highlights that farms that joined the Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme (SBLAS) in 2014 saw an average of 5% reduction in CO₂ per unit of beef produced, while farms that joined the Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme (SDAS) in the same year saw an average of 9% reduction



Deirdre Ryan, Director Origin Green and Sustainable Assurance, Bord Bia (Irish Food Board)

in CO₂ per unit of milk produced. Food manufacturers also reduced energy usage by 11% and water usage by 17% per unit of output.

Origin Green has incorporated the SDGs and the corresponding targets in its objectives and uses them as guidance in the ongoing development of the programme. In 2016, Bord Bia demonstrated the alignment of the Origin Green Charter with nine of the 17 UN SDGs. The Charter guides the development of a three-to-five year plan committing to specific sustainability improvements across three key areas: raw material sourcing, manufacturing/operational processes and social sustainability.

Subsequently, with the addition of new target areas to the charter, such as packaging under raw material sourcing, and diversity and inclusion under social sustainability, the Origin Green Charter now aligns with 15 of the 17 UN SDGs.

To further support Origin Green's alignment with the UN SDGs, Bord Bia became a United

Nations Global Compact (UNGC) member on 26 June, 2018. This further guides Bord Bia's ongoing development and evolution of the Origin Green programme into the future, and deepens Bord Bia's steadfast commitment to promoting the delivery of the SDGs within the Irish food and drink industry. ■

For more information visit: Origingreen.ie

UNA-UK thanks Bord Bia (The Irish Food Board) for its generous support for this publication



Feeding a post-COVID world

Global lockdown exposes the urgent need to transform our fragile, unsustainable food systems – or billions more will go hungry

By **Cindy Holleman**, Senior Economist of Food Security and Nutrition, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN

Even before COVID-19, the world was well off course to end hunger. In 2014, levels of hunger began to rise, wiping away decades of progress. The current pandemic is yet another shock – with unprecedented global reach – that is undermining our efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goal of ending hunger by 2030 (SDG 2).

It is also a wake-up call that offers an opportunity to re-evaluate how we tackle the root causes of our predicament and start anew, before it is too late. This ‘pause’ requires that we look honestly at the facts on hunger – not only on how we define hunger, but also at the drivers behind the trends and inequalities in access to food that lie at the heart of the problem. It requires that we understand the interconnected nature of these drivers, and the shortcomings of our food systems.

Hunger and food insecurity

There is ample food for everyone on the planet. Data show that there are more than enough calories or dietary energy available to meet every individual’s needs. This holds true across all country-income groups, including low-income countries. We live in a world that has achieved extraordinary economic growth, resulting in the unprecedented accumulation of wealth.

Yet, despite these achievements, the paradox is that millions of people around

the world still face basic deprivation in terms of hunger, food insecurity and malnourishment. In countries both rich and poor, low disposable income relative to the high cost of food is the most serious impediment to accessing not only minimum dietary needs, but also the nutritious foods essential for a healthy, active life.

The unaffordability of healthy foods is associated with increasing food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition, including stunting, wasting, being overweight and obesity. Diet quality is a critical link between food security and nutrition. Unhealthy diets are a leading cause of non-communicable diseases, many of which form the underlying health conditions that make COVID-19 so deadly for so many people. Meeting the food security and nutrition targets of SDG 2 will only be possible if people not only have enough to eat, but are also eating food that is nutritious.

The latest *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* report provides a clear picture of the predicament the world faces. Using the traditional measure of hunger – the minimum dietary energy requirement – nearly 690 million people in the world suffer from undernourishment or chronic food deprivation. But if we look beyond the calories and consider whether that food is nutritious or healthy, we see that more than 1.5 billion people cannot afford a diet that meets essential nutrient needs and that three billion people cannot afford the cheapest healthy diet.



Healthy diets are more than double the cost of a diet that merely meets nutrient requirements, and are five times more expensive than a diet that only meets minimum energy requirements. Most of the poor around the world, in both rich and poor countries, cannot afford either a nutrient-adequate or a healthy diet. The least cost of either diet is far more expensive than the full value of the international poverty line of \$1.90 per person per day. Where hunger and food insecurity are greater, the cost of a healthy diet even exceeds average national food expenditures.

The greatest threats to food security

We were not doing well even before COVID-19 hit. The latest estimates show



© UNICEF/RyengR

that 10 million more people suffered chronic food deprivation in the last year and nearly 60 million more have become hungry in the last five years.

Increasing climate variability and frequent climate extremes are a significant threat to food security and are a key driver behind the recent rise in hunger. Evidence shows that significant increases in chronic hunger are occurring in countries where agriculture, food supply chains and livelihoods are vulnerable to climate extremes. Food price spikes and volatility, often combined with losses in agricultural income, follow climate extremes. They reduce access to food and negatively affect the quantity, quality and dietary diversity of the food consumed.

Civil insecurity and conflict also threaten food security. Marked increases in the number and complexity of conflicts in the last 10 years have eroded gains in food security, leading several countries to the brink of famine. Internal conflicts have surpassed the number of interstate conflicts, with a significant rise in internationalised internal conflicts. More than half of the people that are undernourished live in countries struggling with some form of conflict, violence or fragility. Conflict often damages access to food, as it causes deep economic recessions that drive up inflation, disrupts employment and erodes finances for social protection.

Indeed, economic slowdowns and recessions are another prominent driver

▲ Families visit an outreach clinic in Verteth, South Sudan for nutrition and health checkups. Civil war, ongoing conflict and floods have made the world's newest country also one of the world's most food insecure. Twelve UN agencies are active in the country, with the objective of increasing community resilience, strengthening governance and reinvigorating the local economy

behind rises in hunger, irrespective of whether they are driven by market swings, trade wars, political unrest or a global pandemic. Most countries where hunger has increased have experienced economic slowdowns or recessions. Of the 77 countries that experienced a rise in hunger between 2011 and 2017, 65 of them saw their economy slowing or contracting. Economic declines are also statistically related to rising food insecurity. They

negatively affect access to food as they lead to rises in unemployment and declines in wages and incomes. People's access to food, especially for the poor who spend a large portion of their income on food, can be severely affected. Access to nutritious food is even more compromised, due to the higher relative cost.

COVID-19 is delivering yet another economic hit, and is projected to plunge most nations into recession in 2020, with per capita income contracting in more countries than at any time since 1870. We are facing one of the deepest global recessions in decades, despite the extraordinary efforts of governments to counter the downturn with fiscal and monetary policy support. As many as 132 million more people could go hungry in 2020 as a result of COVID-19. The pandemic is hitting hard, upending food supply chains and eroding people's ability to purchase food as they lose their income and livelihoods.

Underlying all these contributory drivers is the primary culprit: inequality. Income and wealth inequalities are closely associated with access to food, both in terms of people running out of food and experiencing hunger (severe food insecurity), and facing uncertainties about their ability to obtain food and having to compromise on food quality or quantity (moderate food insecurity).

Income inequality has been shown to increase the likelihood of food insecurity and undercut the positive effect of any economic growth on individual food security. These findings are significant, as inequality in income has remained high and persistent in all countries, and is rising in nearly half the countries in the world. The pandemic is only accelerating this inequality.

Actions to tackle hunger

First, we must fundamentally change the way we report hunger, food security and, by extension, poverty. Poverty is currently

defined by the income required to meet basic needs, including minimum food or energy needs. Yet it is now clear that the international poverty line cannot provide access to even the cheapest of nutrient requirements, let alone nutritious foods and a healthy diet.

In a world of wealth it is a crime against humanity to set the bar so low. There are billions of people technically above the line who in reality are hungry, food insecure or living in poverty. We need to show the extent of hunger in the world as it really is, and move from basic energy requirements to minimum healthy diets as our primary measure.

Governments must place the pursuit of affordable healthy diets at the heart of agricultural policies, social protection and investment decisions. To increase affordability, the cost of nutritious foods must come down. This requires intervention along the entire food supply chain to eliminate food losses and enhance efficiencies. Coupled with this, governments must also implement complementary policies that promote healthy diets.

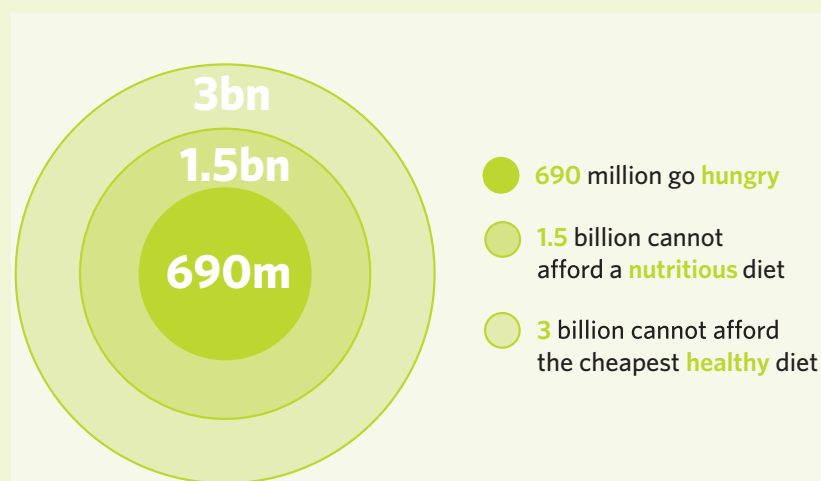
Sustainability must be an integral part of this endeavor. Currently, our food systems are successful at producing low-cost calories that feed a demand for unhealthy diets. They also generate up to one third of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Without action, the healthcare costs of non-communicable disease and mortality associated with poor diets are projected to exceed \$1.3 trillion per year by 2030, and the social costs of GHG emissions could reach more than \$1.7 trillion.

Yet win-win solutions are within our grasp. According to the *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020* report, shifting to healthy diets could reduce direct and indirect health costs by up to 97 per cent by 2030, and slash the social cost of GHG emissions by between 41 and 74 per cent.

We must also deal with the urgent challenges created by conflict, climate variability and extremes, and economic slowdowns. Addressing the root causes of conflict will involve humanitarian,

Hunger, malnutrition and health

Hunger is the uncomfortable or painful sensation caused by not meeting the minimum dietary energy requirement. Hunger, sometimes referred to as undernutrition, is a subset of malnutrition that results from deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in the consumption of macro or micronutrients. The term 'healthy diet' goes a step beyond 'nutritious': a nutritious diet provides the minimum levels of energy and micronutrients, whereas a healthy diet promotes good health and helps protect against non-communicable diseases.



development and peace-building strategies that meet immediate needs, while making the necessary investments to build resilience for lasting peace and food security and nutrition for all.

Meeting the challenge posed by climate variability and extremes requires that we scale up actions to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacity of people and the agricultural and food systems. We need integrated – rather than dissociated – disaster risk reduction and management and climate change adaptation policies, programmes and practices with short, medium and long-term vision.

Economic resilience must be strengthened to safeguard food security and nutrition against economic adversity. Short and medium-term policies should aim at achieving a pro-poor and inclusive transformation, but this will not be possible by focusing only on economic growth.

In the short term, countries need to protect incomes and purchasing power to counteract economic adversity. In the longer term, countries must invest to reduce economic vulnerabilities and inequalities; build capacity to withstand shocks; maintain health and other social expenditures; and use policy tools to create healthier food environments. Existing inequalities must be tackled at all levels, through focused, multi-sectoral policies.

The good news is that we have the knowledge and tools needed to do these things. We also have the experience and evidence that lead to successful policies and practices. We have the know-how, means, wealth and capacity to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition, and to transform how we use the land and generate energy. Achieving them is a matter of politics, not scarcity.

The unaffordability of nutritious food in a world of wealth is a global tragedy. Making healthy diets universally affordable should be a cause for our times. It will improve billions of lives and save trillions in health and environmental costs. COVID-19 has exposed the fragility of food security, but also shows us that transforming our food systems can put us back on track to ending world hunger. ●

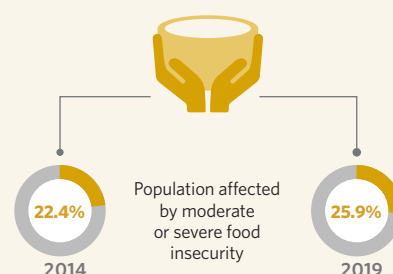
2 ZERO HUNGER



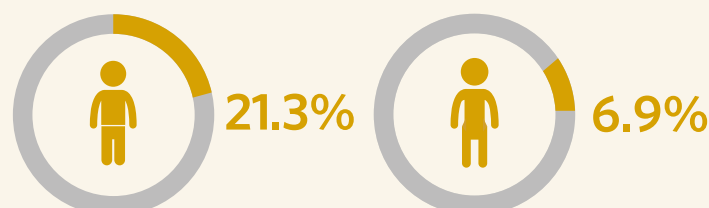
End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Food insecurity was already on the rise before COVID-19. An estimated **2 billion** people were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2019

Those facing severe food insecurity – around 750 million people – tend to run out of food and, at worst, go a day, or days, without eating.



Stunting and wasting among children under 5 are likely to worsen

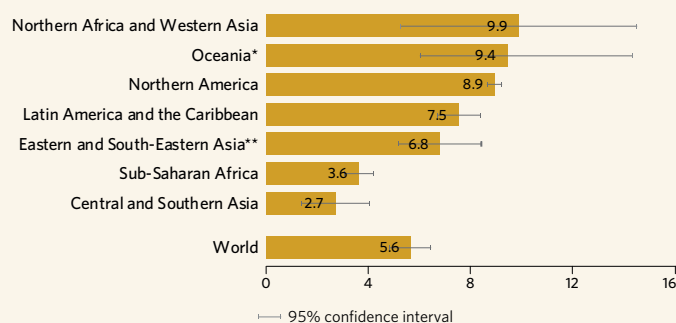


144 million children under 5 are stunted. Chronic undernutrition, or stunting, puts children at greater risk of dying from common infections. It is also associated with poor cognitive development.

47 million children under 5 are affected by wasting (2019). Wasting is when under-nutrition results in low weight-for-height.

Proportion of children under 5 who are overweight, 2019 (percentage)

Excess weight in childhood is recognised as a global public health problem because of its pernicious effect on incidence of acute and chronic diseases, and the impact it has on healthy development and overall quality of life.

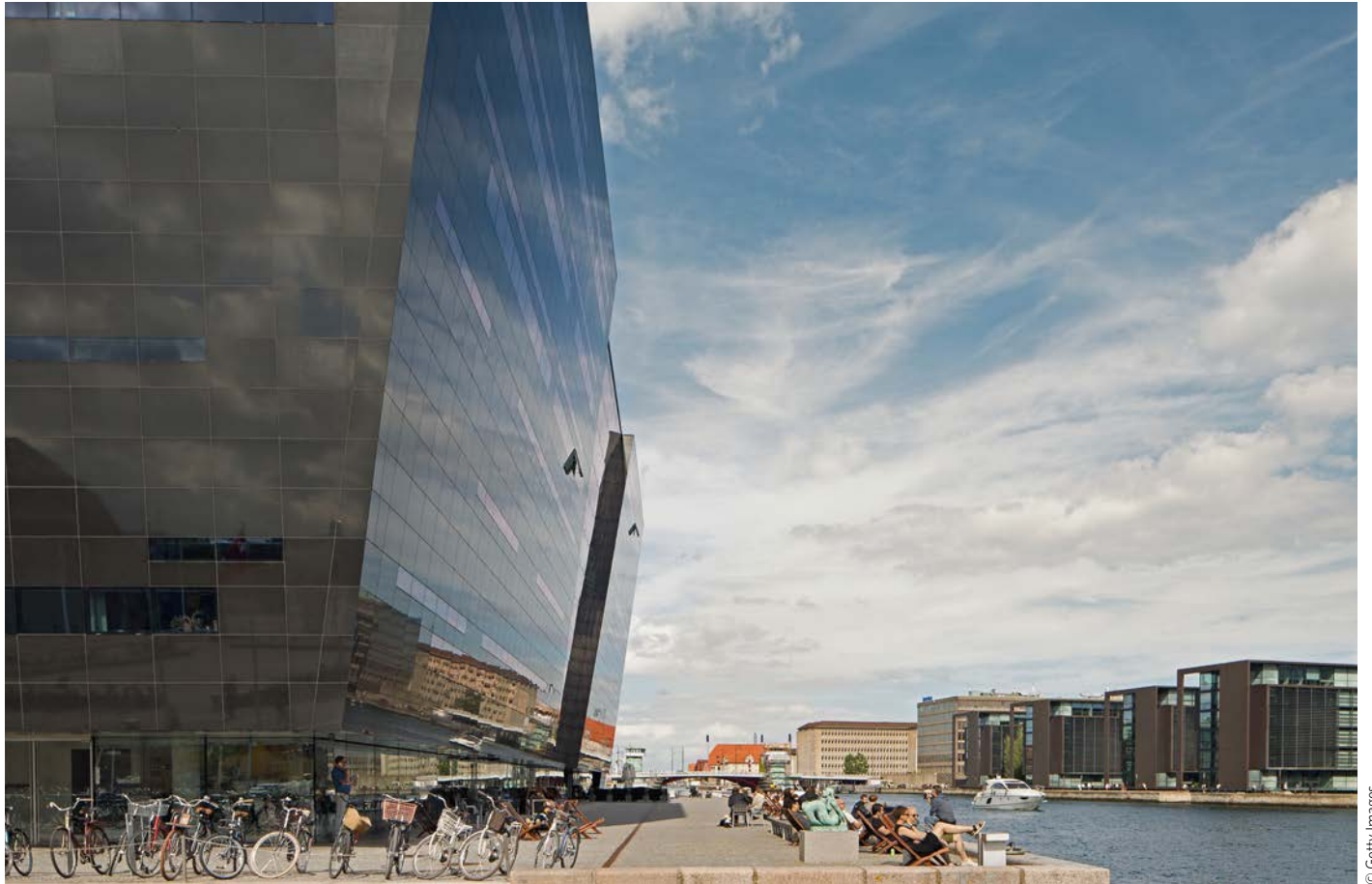


— 95% confidence interval

* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

** Excluding Japan.

Note: Data coverage is low for Europe, so it is not included in the chart



© Getty Images

A new approach to mobility

Mobility is an essential determinant of quality of life, thrown into chaos by the pandemic. The need to press ahead with developing sustainable, inclusive means of mobility is more urgent than ever

By **Marie Thynell**, Associate Professor, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg

One hundred years after the introduction of automobility, policymakers and users are recognising that for countries to develop and for cities to prosper, citizens must be connected and mobile. As the influential architect and urban designer Jan Gehl explains: “Well-designed neighbourhoods inspire the people who live in them, whilst poorly designed cities [and systems of transport] brutalise their citizens.”

Reducing the need for motorised travel

The global population is on the move. The World Bank predicts that by 2050, the total number of vehicles on the road will double from current figures to about two billion. The International Transport Forum, meanwhile, estimates that demand for both passenger and freight transport will triple worldwide between 2015 and 2050. Emissions and noise are increasing, and the demand for modern infrastructure and the space in which to build it are growing, impacting quality of life for millions of city dwellers.

At the same time, resilience and sustainability are climbing up the global agenda as governments imagine their urban futures in different ways. In 2019, the SLOCAT Partnership, which works to promote low-carbon land transport, stated that current transport-sector mitigation commitments and actions are not enough to limit global warming to below 2°C. Transportation is responsible for 23 per cent of energy-related GHG emissions, indicating the need for accelerated action and for ambitious adaptation efforts. In September 2020, the EU sharpened its policies,

◀ **Copenhagen waterfront, viewed from outside the Royal Danish Library extension. Over the course of several decades, Copenhagen has been transformed from a car-dominated to a pedestrian-orientated city**

announcing a new target to cut emissions by 60 per cent by 2030.

Fighting climate change in a world characterised by mass motorisation is already an enormous challenge. Now the world faces the immediate issue of tackling coronavirus. Immobility and marginalisation, both functions of national lockdowns, are the counterparts of development progress, access and connectivity. How do we make future mobility work, given the conditions and experiences that may become the 'new normal' of the 21st century? Insights from the past and from the current pandemic underline the crucial role that sustainable transport must play in achieving Agenda 2030.

Look more closely at the shape of current transport systems, however, and it's evident that the exclusion of important citizen groups contributes to both spatial and social immobility, and inequality. Yet the links between spatial and social mobility have been poorly understood in the transport sector. In modern communities, people need to reach markets, workplaces and educational and social services safely. Redesigning systems of transport to make them sustainable and inclusive is therefore a win-win strategy.

Shifting to sustainable transport

In designing an approach to global mobility, we can successfully build on the legacy of both Jan Gehl (mentioned above) and the hugely influential scholar, urbanist and activist, the late Jane Jacobs. Both champion taking a people-centred approach to urban development.

Taking their pioneering insights as our lead, we should think of mobility primarily at the human, rather than the city or country, scale. We need to develop mobility solutions that are modern, inclusive and ecological if we are to both achieve Agenda 2030 and confront climate change. We must ensure that everyone has access to safe, healthy and low or zero-emission transport options, including non-motorised, active modes of

transport like walking or cycling. This vision is the antithesis of the 'car city' of the 20th century, with Los Angeles as perhaps its ultimate archetype.

The heart of future urban transportation is therefore the nexus of public space and mobility. Sustainable transport will play a key role in achieving this. Several countries are redesigning policy and planning towards the transition to liveable streets and clean mobility, recognising that these will be essential to achieving many of the other Global Goals and targets, such as SDG 1 (end poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (ensure healthy lives and well-being), target 3.6 (halve global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents) and target 3.9 (cut deaths and illness from pollution).

As Gehl writes: "The street, the footpath, the square, and the park are the grammar

More cities are finding ways to incorporate energy efficiency and environmental measures on a massive scale

of the city; they provide the structure that enables cities to come to life, and encourage and accommodate diverse activities from the quiet and contemplative to the noisy and busy." Jacobs adds that we must, "...encourage pedestrian traffic, that uses streets for a variety of reasons at all hours". She also finds that streets and buildings with heterogeneous designs and uses encourage a socio-economic mix of activities and stakeholders. She notes that short blocks work better for walkers than long 'superblocks', and that a certain amount of urban density is needed for people to thrive in cities (countering planning theory of the early 20th century that often viewed urban density as undesirable).

Gehl urges us to think about how cities work at eye level, in harmony with the human scale. Both Jacobs and Gehl dismiss walls, closed spaces and long distances in cities. Enabling people to travel at high

speeds on different height levels impedes people's ability to hear and see well while walking or cycling, which in turn negatively impact on people's enjoyment of streets and public spaces. The cities they espouse favour short distances, low traffic speed and a single street level (rather than elevated streets or subways), making it possible for people to gather, integrate and interact with other travellers. Prior to lockdown such exchanges were also taking place in public transport and among commuting cyclists and walkers in densely populated cities.

Improving energy efficiency

When critically assessing transport systems and their modus operandi, a few observations are made. For instance, in accordance with SDG target 11.2, transport systems must meet the travel needs of all, including low-income citizens in urban and rural areas. Women must be able to safely use transport without harassment. Vulnerable groups such as the elderly and children must be able to move around safely. We need to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists over cars.

Several cities, including Seoul, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Copenhagen, New York, Mexico City and Bogota, have already introduced many of Gehl's ideas. They have provided more space for green areas, walking and cycling, and have introduced appropriate signalling for all modes of transport. As safety in these cities increases, so does the active mobility modes and life in the streets.

Creating a more inclusive transport system will also help to reduce carbon emissions, and by doing so contribute to achieving the SDG targets on energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure, social and gender equality and urban access. Encouragingly, more and more cities are favouring low-carbon mobility and are finding ways to incorporate energy efficiency and environmental measures on a massive scale.

The 2020 pandemic, with its lockdowns, has shown what isolation, transport exclusion and spatial immobility implies. Facilitating access to workplaces, parks, hospitals and other services is a prerequisite for progress in modern societies. It is also essential if we are to confront the growing problems related to inequalities and developmental progress. ●

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Front cover: Manaus, Brazil, a volunteer nurse from the Witoto tribe, putting on personal protective equipment.

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SDGs 2020: sustainability

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About us

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The United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK) is the only UK charity devoted to building support for an effective UN, and a vibrant grassroots movement campaigning for a safer, fairer and more sustainable world

In 1945, the creation of the UN reflected the hope for a better future. Since then, UNA-UK has enabled ordinary people to engage with that promise.

Today, the need for the UN has never been greater, as we face an unprecedented global health emergency. COVID-19 has devastated lives and livelihoods across the world, and exposed the fragility of our societies and economies. We are seeing the first rise in global poverty in over 20 years and the first drop in human development in three decades. Longstanding inequalities – gender, racial and income – are deepening. Meanwhile, the grave risks posed by the climate crisis, by nuclear weapons and by conflict and violence have disappeared only from our headlines.

The pandemic has underscored how interconnected we are. We know that when we work together, we can make progress – from supporting decolonisation to ending apartheid, increasing life expectancy and living standards, creating laws and standards to protect us all, closing the ozone hole and eradicating deadly diseases such as smallpox. Now, we need global cooperation like never before – across borders, sectors and generations. That is the

only way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, our roadmap for a better future for all.

Please support us

UNA-UK is ready to play its part. We serve as a bridge between governments, the UN and the public. We lobby for joined-up thinking on peace, sustainable development and human rights. We work with experts and practitioners to find new ways to tackle the challenges we face. Through education and training, we equip young people to play a role in international affairs. And by demonstrating why the UN matters, we encourage people to act on their responsibilities as global citizens.

In 2020 we ran a global consultation under our ‘Together First Initiative’. We identified ten key reforms our global system needs, notably a high-level champion for civil society within the UN.

We will be working to achieve these reforms in the year ahead. Please contact us if you would like to get involved. ●

Please visit www.una.org.uk or contact us at: info@una.org.uk



Gold Mining's Contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals

The gold mining industry is committed to supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 1:
No poverty



China Gold supporting communities around its operation in Zhengfeng resulting in the county being removed from the list of impoverished areas by the government in 2020

SDG 3:
Good health and well-being



Newcrest bringing down the mortality rates in Papua New Guinea with nursing and midwifery training

SDG 5:
Gender equality



Endeavour Mining's Women in Mining programme is committing to create a more diverse workforce with long-term skills development and career path mapping

SDG 7:
Affordable and clean energy



Agnico Eagle donating and installing solar energy systems at 18 schools and six communities surrounding their mine in Mexico

SDG 9:
Industry, innovation and infrastructure



Alamos Gold collaborating with communities to modernise farming practices in Mexico by providing basic needs such as water, education, nutrition and farming assistance

SDG 12:
Responsible consumption and production



Eldorado Gold helping to accelerate land restoration in Greece through technological innovation via a new facility

SDG 15:
Life on land



Oceana Gold is protecting a local lizard species around its mine in New Zealand providing an additional lizard habitat

SDG 17:
Partnerships for the goals



Wheaton Precious Metals joining forces with partner mines to finance environmental and social initiatives

SDG 2:
Zero hunger



Barrick Gold and Shandong Gold's Agricultural Procurement Plan in conjunction with Aramark helping farmers to share benefits of the mine and further local food security

SDG 4:
Quality education



Golden Star's Development Foundation helping children stay in school through classroom, dormitory and bus stop building in Ghana

SDG 6:
Clean water and sanitation



IAMGOLD providing safe water for over 100,000 people in Burkina Faso

SDG 8:
Decent work and economic growth



Centerra Gold purchasing goods and services in the local market to promote income development and job growth in the Kyrgyz Republic

SDG 10:
Reduce inequalities



Sibanye-Stillwater helping to improve financial literacy and understanding in South Africa through its 'CARE for iMali' employee initiative

SDG 13:
Climate action



Newmont's Borden 'mine of the future' the first all-electric underground mine, eliminating all GHG emissions associated with diesel-based equipment

SDG 16:
Peace, justice and strong institutions



AngloGold Ashanti integrating on-line human rights training into the compliance programme for staff at all levels

To find out more, read our latest report at www.gold.org