

DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO BUILD BACK BETTER AFTER COVID-19

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COVID-19 is transforming our world. Governments, institutions and citizens alike are struggling to respond effectively. Health systems have been first affected and both public health and healthcare responses have been severely challenged.

The WHO declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020 and then a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (1). Health professionals have felt particularly threatened by potential and ongoing overwhelming demand, disruption to essential treatments, pressure on key resources and increased risk of infection for themselves and their families. The public health measures required to limit transmission have also caused consternation with the major socio-economic impacts being increasingly recognised (2). These has resulted in tension between the need to contain transmission of infection and protect the health of the populations versus the need to re-start economic activities and social and civil services.

Less recognised are tensions between different approaches to recovery, including among those concerned about sustainability and health. Should we aim to get the world back to 'business as usual' so we can resume to our mainstream economic models and activity? Or should we use the disruption arising from COVID-19 as an opportunity to realise the kind of transformative change the 2030 Agenda aspires towards (3), a major re-alignment in our approach to economics, environment and social well-being; one that represents a real commitment to sustainable development and might have key implications for how we travel, what we eat, how we relax, what we purchase and how we produce goods and services? We want to examine not only the potential adverse impacts of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also the post-crisis reform opportunities to 'build back better' and tackle some of our most intractable problems; problems such as mankind's addiction to the use of fossil fuels, our relentless destruction of natural habitats and wildlife, and the steadily increasing disparities in health, wealth and opportunity between and within countries, not to forget also socio-economic and institutional challenges, such as the global chronic underinvestment on public health preparedness.

We do not pretend that this will be an easy task either politically or technically and it would be easy to get lost in the detail of individual targets and indicators. Therefore, at the proof of concept stage, we propose to use our existing evidence base to explore these impacts and opportunities by clustering the SDGs into the 5 P's of Sustainable Development, each covering a subset of relevant SDGs: People (SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 4 and SDG 5), Planet (SDG 6, SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 14 and SDG 15), Prosperity (SDG 7, SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 10 and SDG 11), Peace (SDG 16) and Partnership (SDG 17). We will monitor international efforts and inform this work, such as the United Nations' efforts to save lives, protect people, and rebuild better, alongside the health response, led by the World Health Organization, and the humanitarian response, as detailed in the UN-led COVID19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (4).

(1) WHO Timeline - COVID-19. World Health Organization Website. Last accessed on 29 April: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>

(2) The Great Lockdown. World Economic Outlook, April 2020. International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook Reports. Accessible at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/04/14/weo-april-2020>

(3) Policy Innovations for Transformative Change. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). Geneva, 2016. Accessible at: [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B42004CCC77/\(httpInfoFiles\)/2D9B6E61A43A7E87C125804F003285F5/\\$file/Flagship2016_FullReport.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B42004CCC77/(httpInfoFiles)/2D9B6E61A43A7E87C125804F003285F5/$file/Flagship2016_FullReport.pdf)

(4) A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19. United Nations Sustainable Development Group. April 2020. Accessible at: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-framework-immediate-socio-economic-response-covid-19>

IDENTIFIED INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN COVID-19 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PEOPLE

IMPACT

OPPORTUNITIES



- The poor face a deepening of their situation
- New segments of society pushed into poverty
- Larger proportion of society relying on social protection

- Access to basic services for all
 - Including safe housing, healthcare, childcare, education, water, and sanitation
- Social protection programmes
 - Including cash transfers and micro credits
- Reduce the share of informal and unprotected work



- Increase in the number of people suffering from food insecurity
 - Restriction of access to sufficient, diverse and nutritious food, further exacerbating undernutrition and overweight
 - Increase in the cost of food, having a particularly adverse impact on lower-income households
 - Restriction of exports by food-exporting countries leading to food depletion in other countries (beggar-thy-neighbour policies)
- The nutrition of children and youth that rely on meals provided at schools is compromised

- Safe and resilient food systems for access to nutritious food by all
 - Invest in local production and distribution
 - Continuity plans for food businesses and farmers to maintain the supply through emergencies
 - Digital technologies to facilitate the interface between supply and demand, help building the resilience of food chains and reduce food waste
- Strengthen international development assistance for food, feeding and agriculture
 - Multilateral (WFP, IFAD, FAO), bilateral assistance and civil society
- Good practices in animal husbandry and food safety
 - Under the One Health approach
 - Reduce the risk of emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases
- Redesign access and consumption of food (e.g. increased e-commerce deliveries)



- Catastrophic amount of deaths
- Health systems collapse, leading to upsurge or worsening of patients with conditions other than COVID19
 - Reduced access to healthcare and adequate treatment
 - Health systems' lack of capacity due to prioritization of COVID19
 - Patients' fear of infection
 - Shortage of essential medicines due to misuse
 - Economic impact threatens patients' buying power
 - Increase in mental health issues due to stress and isolation
 - Reduced investments to other public health priority areas
 - Spread of health misinformation and fake news
- Negative effects on healthcare workers
 - Higher risk of COVID-19 infection and death
 - Lack of personal protective equipment
 - Higher stress and workload

- Affordable and accessible healthcare for all
 - Political commitment to universal health coverage
 - Protection of the most vulnerable and marginalized
- Strengthening public health emergency preparedness and response
 - Financial investment and political commitment
 - Capacity building of health systems and staff to cope with emergencies
 - Health literacy and health information and communication programs
 - Multilateral support mechanisms
 - Regional and international collaborative preparedness networks
 - Provide public goods where they are most needed (including essential medicines, medical personnel and equipment, and PPE)
 - Multilateral and bilateral investments (including ODA)
- Strengthened public health and healthcare services
 - Investment in overall health systems strengthening
 - Secure medical goods' supply chains
 - Improvements in inefficient and inadequate care
 - Increase healthcare workers numbers through recruitment, training and retention
 - Increased use of technology in caregiving
- Reorientation of healthcare services to an increased proximity to patients & communities
 - Enhanced role for primary care keeping people away from hospitals
 - Provision of healthcare at home and remote medical advice through telehealth, including remote drug prescription and home delivery
- Programs for mental health

IDENTIFIED INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN COVID-19 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PEOPLE

IMPACT

OPPORTUNITIES

- Long-lasting disruptions in children and youth education
 - Access to technology or internet connectivity is an obstacle to remote learning, especially for disadvantaged households
 - Caregivers that have limited formal education and resources have more difficulties supporting their children in following school curriculums from home
 - Developmental effects on children due to extended isolation periods without contact with peers
 - Financial hardship suffered because of unemployment might lead to limited access to education
- Negative effects on educational institutions and staff
 - High risk of COVID-19 infection for vulnerable staff
 - Increased demand on teachers by following hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Exacerbating gender inequality
 - Disproportionate social, economic and health impacts on women
 - Over-represented in the most affected frontline sectors (e.g. health and social care, education, retail)
 - Disproportionate burden in informal care
 - Increased risk of domestic and family violence
 - Face hurdles in access to social protection
 - Disproportionate health and economic impacts on men
 - More severely impacted by direct health effects of COVID19
 - Over-represented in most affected economic sectors (e.g. construction, aviation, entertainment)

- Shift towards 'learning anywhere, anytime' concept of education
 - Traditional in-person classroom learning complemented/replaced by digital and distance learning modalities
 - Need for affordable access to digital technologies and internet for all
 - Reframing the focus of formal education to building skills such as informed decision-making, creative problem-solving, and adaptability
- Incorporation of the education sector into preparedness and response planning
 - Improvement of the effectiveness and feasibility of health interventions in the school environment
- Educational and research institutions worldwide are stimulated to innovate
- Cross-industry public-private educational partnerships

- Uphold the gender inequality social and economic agenda
 - Strategies and programs to achieve and maintain gender equity at all levels of society, including the gender pay gap
 - Increase social protection and programs against domestic violence
 - Shifts in household norms for men to assume unpaid care responsibilities
- Gender analysis and lens
 - Incorporation into preparedness and response efforts to improve the effectiveness of health interventions
 - Scientific research relating the differentiated impact of health issues with biological sex differences
 - Collection of disaggregated data to inform evidence-based policy making



IDENTIFIED INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN COVID-19 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PLANET

IMPACT

OPPORTUNITIES



- Negative impact on the access to safe drinking-water and sanitation
 - Broken supply chains
 - Halt of WASH programs
 - Rural areas, slums, refugee camps and informal settlements are especially vulnerable

- Safe drinking water and sanitation services for all
 - Expand and strengthen safe drinking water supply chains
 - Emergency water, handwashing and sanitation facilities in key locations
 - Ensure affordability is not a barrier to access for vulnerable populations
 - International development assistance for WASH programs



- Lifting restrictions might increase unsustainable consumption and production
 - Unregulated production by states and companies to catch up economically
 - Uncontrolled consumption by the population
 - Short-term surge in food and single-use PPE waste

- Sustainable production and consumption models at all levels
 - Transition to a sustainable economy
- Higher levels of self-sustainability
 - Increased support to local production and distribution
 - Increased focus on waste management



- Improved air quality and decreased greenhouse gas emissions
 - Driven by social distancing, lower energy demands and slowdown of economic and industrial activity
 - Effect might be temporary and lead to an emissions growth as economies accelerate efforts to get back on track
- Lower investment, prioritization and commitment to climate action

- Stimulus packages focused on the transition to a green and sustainable economy
 - Including energy, production, consumption and transport systems
 - It will bring long-term economic benefits including ODA and support to least developed countries
 - Window for carbon tax or a tax on fossil fuels



- Overfishing after restrictions are lifted
 - Driven by increased poverty, hunger and the need for rapid economic recovery
 - Increase in water and ocean pollution

- Regulate overfishing and water pollution
 - Scale up best practices for fish and water use
 - Stepping-up the One Health approach
 - Focus on sustainability, biodiversity and preserving ecosystems



- Uncontrolled and irresponsible land use
 - Driven by increased poverty and hunger
 - The need for a rapid economic recovery might accelerate natural habitat destruction through exploitation
 - Increased desertification
- Introduction of regulation of wildlife markets

- Regulate global wildlife trade, deforestation and unsustainable land exploitation
 - Scale up best practices for land and animal use
 - Stepping-up the One Health approach
 - Focus on sustainability, biodiversity and preserving ecosystems
 - Bans on the consumption and farming of wild animals
 - Restoration of degraded land for production and conservation purposes

IDENTIFIED INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN COVID-19 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PROSPERITY

IMPACT

OPPORTUNITIES

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



- Disruptions in energy production and access affect energy security
 - Due to disruptions in supply chains and personnel
 - Affects particularly vulnerable locations and populations
- Rebound effect on energy use once human activity recommences
- Undermines commitments and investments in clean energy transition

- Enable universal access to affordable and reliable energy for all
- Accelerate clean energy transition
 - Large-scale investments in clean energy technologies
 - Investment in increasing energy efficiency
 - It contributes to stimulate the economy e.g. the European Green Deal

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



- Global macro-economic recession/depression
 - Supply shocks and reduced demand reverse economic growth
 - The loss of income translates into lower consumer spending, fuelling the recession even further
 - High financial market volatility and a rise in fear and insecurity causes contagion among asset classes
 - Spillover effects among economies worldwide
 - Vulnerable economies are hit the hardest
 - High levels of capital outflows from developing countries
 - Exacerbate financial and debt vulnerabilities among the most indebted countries (e.g. South Europe)
 - Collapse of the tourism sector on countries that deeply rely on it (e.g. South Europe)
 - Fall in commodity prices, particularly oil, in highly dependent commodity exporters (e.g. Central Asia)
 - Rise in unemployment and underemployment
 - Unprecedented loss of jobs in the hardest hit sectors (construction, transport, tourism, entertainment, retail)
 - Lower income and loss of jobs lead to a rise in poverty
 - Downward adjustments to wages and working hours
 - Younger, older and less qualified workers are more vulnerable to falling labour demand and consequent economic vulnerabilities
 - Higher impact on small and medium enterprises and individuals with mortgages and student loans
- Reduced private and public investments to achieve the SDGs

- Global coordination of fiscal and economic policies, trade, and international support
 - Policies focused on providing employment and social protection measures to the most vulnerable e.g. Income support, unemployment benefits, protection of low-income earners and medium and small enterprises
 - Humanitarian aid, financial assistance, debt relief to vulnerable countries
- Improve workers' conditions, social protection and labour rights
 - Including decent working conditions and wages for all, access to affordable healthcare, paid sick and parental/care leave and social assistance
 - Encourage appropriate flexible working arrangements, such as teleworking
- New human-centered, inclusive and sustainable economic models
 - Investment in green energy and resource efficiency
 - Decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation
 - Investment in public health to build resilience against future health crisis
 - It has a multiplier effect on the economy
 - New distributive economic policies (e.g. universal basic income, fiscal policies)
 - Diversification of economic activity
 - Emergence of new economic sectors
 - Diversification of the labour sector

IDENTIFIED INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN COVID-19 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PROSPERITY

IMPACT

OPPORTUNITIES

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



- Increased gap on technology, infrastructure and industrialization among countries and populations
 - Least developed countries are the most affected
 - Vulnerable are more affected (e.g. rural communities and small-scale industries)
- Slowdown in sustainable industrialization upgrading processes
 - Lower investment on resource-use efficiency and adoption of clean industrial processes
- Decrease in investment on research and innovation
 - But greater investment in pharmaceutical R&D for COVID-19

- Development of efficient and sustainable infrastructures
 - Focus on affordable and equitable access for all
 - Including ODA to least developed countries
 - Investment in infrastructure helps relaunching economic activity
- Increase investment in scientific research and innovation
 - COVID-19 is a stimulus to innovate
- Universal access to internet and digital and information technologies

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



- Worsening inequalities
 - Disproportionate impact on poorer and marginalized segments of the population e.g. People with underlying health conditions, the elderly, homeless, migrants, refugees, people living in slums, unemployed
 - Vulnerable workers are likely to be disproportionately hit as they do not have the same access to workplace entitlements
 - Marginalized populations may create endemic silos of COVID-19
- Rise in stigma, discrimination, xenophobia and isolationist sentiments

- Policies that reduce inequality
 - National social and healthcare initiatives affordable to all vulnerable groups to ensure the universal human right to health
 - Decent wage and income growth for the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average
 - International assistance and cooperation to least developed countries
- Programs and regulations against stigma, discrimination and social exclusion
 - Social protection measures to cover refugees and migrants
 - Prioritize and regulate asylum-seeking and refugee integration processes
 - Increase diversity in decision making

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



- Vulnerable communities are the most affected
 - High density areas with poor living conditions, increase the risk of poorer health outcomes and of creating COVID-19 silos
- Decreased investment in sustainable housing and green communities

- Building sustainable and resilient cities and communities
 - Access to affordable, high-quality housing for all
 - Safe, inclusive and green neighbourhoods for all
 - Expand an accessible and affordable public transportation network
 - New technologies, such as artificial intelligence, may better support urban planning and disaster response Including traffic management, infection detection, logistics supply chain

IDENTIFIED INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN COVID-19 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PEACE & PARTNERSHIPS

IMPACT

OPPORTUNITIES



- Threat to global peace
 - Ongoing conflicts threaten an effective COVID-19 global response
 - Escalation of existing conflicts
 - Catastrophic health impacts in conflict zones
 - New conflicts arising in current non-conflict zones
 - Rise in isolationism and decrease in multilateralism
- Threat to social cohesion
 - Discrimination, racism and xenophobia arise as people blame different groups for the crisis – lead to an increase in violence
 - Social conflict driven by economic suffering and differential access to services/treatment by different population groups
 - Sociocultural disruption as authority figures and formerly trusted institutions (e.g. government, international organizations) are shaken
- Authoritarian regimes might rise and threats on human rights increase
 - Driven by the emergency powers that have been granted

- Establish peace and ceasefires in all conflict zones
 - Including processes to recognize early signs of conflict and prevent scaling
 - Step-up of human-rights observers
- Strong and accountable public national and international institutions
 - Increase institutional resilience, preparedness and capacity to deal with crises
 - It challenges institutional stickiness
 - Strengthen the importance of evidence-informed policy-making
 - Put on evidence the need for multilateralism
- Strengthen social cohesion and global unity
 - Coordinated measures against all forms of discrimination
 - Agenda for equity



- Slowdown of globalization processes
 - Rise in nationalism and isolationism as governments prioritise their own national interests, hindering partnerships and multilateralism
- Revitalization of international cooperation by all actors Including the public and private sectors and civil society

- Multilateralism and solidarity among countries and regions
 - Mechanisms for international cooperation to manage future global threats
 - Pandemic prevention and containment as global public goods
 - Reforms in the global political space and institutions
 - Reforms to the international aid and collaboration frameworks
 - Move away from country lending
 - Shift towards money devoted to global public goods
- Harmonization and alignment of different sectors
 - Including health, finance, police, judiciary, education, transport, social protection, foreign policy
 - Collective solutions across the private, non-profit and public sectors
- Build resilience and 'functional redundancy' into complex systems
 - Including finance, value chains, food supply and public health
 - Functional redundancy is when multiple groups share similar roles, ensuring that single failures in a system do not lead to systemic collapse