

Covid-19 and Sustainable Development

Half of the global workforce is currently on lockdown due to COVID-19 and, in the wake of this global crisis, it is important that we remind ourselves of the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#). We must extend our thoughts to how we can protect nature, the economy and human health that can serve us as a safety network now and in future.

‘Wake-up call’

The pandemic is a wake-up call for us to rethink nature – how we deal with it and how we protect it. The economic, environmental, and social impacts due to COVID-19 require responding and planning. Individuals and organisations are already working hard to mitigate the challenges of the pandemic, but we should not lose sight of sustainable development and the UN's sustainable development goals aimed for by 2030. The current worldwide situation is a huge challenge and requires us to be thinking about what we can do individually as well as collectively.

The pandemic is a clear message from nature that we are going beyond the limits of our ecosystems and we are at breaking point. This viral transmission jumped from wildlife which shows we are not in tune with our ecosystems. This calls for shared responsibility and global solidarity. More than a health crisis, this is a human crisis and now it has turned into an economic crisis, unemployment hitting tens of millions of people, just because a huge amount of economic activity is still dependent on the traditional unsustainable patterns of growth and development.

This crisis is also an environmental crisis. We need to learn about wildlife trade acts across the world and keep a tight handle on the immense destruction of nature, which has accelerated economic and biological issues. The expected evolution of nature should not be taken for granted. We should be doing all we can to protect nature from further harm, otherwise we will see devastating consequences for many of the poorer countries as is already happening.

Some people in poor countries face a choice of either dying of hunger or potentially dying of COVID-19, as they do not have social protection. Many are not provided basic food or soap that could stop the spread of the disease. Charities supporting the neediest in society need our help, so this requires all of us (individuals and institutions) to be a little more generous.

A sustainable future?

Despite the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 and the Paris Agreement, we are not moving in the direction of a sustainable future. Job creation, prosperity and equality are recurring issues. Hazardous waste and contaminated materials from hospital treatments are piling up, requiring strategic solutions to address the link between the environment and people's health. There are questions such as: are the poor or most vulnerable being cared for? Who is looking after the people living in slums and urban areas who simply do not have the access to healthcare or the ability to socially distance?

This unprecedented crisis should be addressed through the collective tools, networking, experiences, and knowledge and lessons that we have learnt to date. Equally, it is important that we should be building and strengthening adequate resilience and crisis management capacity at an individual, national and global level.

International cooperation

There is no doubt that international cooperation is needed to champion green economy transformation processes. The current situation forces us to take stock and remind ourselves to not lose sight of what we have achieved in the past and now, we must act, scaling up our aspirations of sustainable development. Of course, urgent decision-making is needed for emergency short- and medium-term response measures, but we should be making sure that these decisions can have an impact in the future too.

In the wake of the global financial crisis in 2008, we conceptualised a green growth and sustainable economy with policies focused on circular economy, synergic partnerships between

institutions with shared visions and missions, developing green finance platforms and green industry platforms. This resulted in several national commitments to sustainable development priorities, including abolishing inequality and poverty, and addressing global, national, and local environmental issues.

We have been in a long four-decade debate of unsustainable patterns of growth and development to the current grown-up concept of sustainable development goals. This led to the amazing global mobilization of young people last year calling on strong and committed actions from governments, industry, finance, science and civil society to address the climate emergency and reverse unsustainable patterns of production that are directly attributed to increasing inequalities and rising poverty today.

The first global report in late 2019 evaluating the Sustainable Development Goals called for urgent targeted actions to avoid reversing the development gains of the past four decades and to form new relationship between people and nature, including addressing climate change and biodiversity loss that is rooted in environmental degradation. This requires a long-term vision and a process that is supported by partnerships, trust, engagement and commitments from institutions all over the world. This also needs to be added as a strategic and political agenda with special status to the representatives of leading international organisations. This will help other institutions focus on environmental issues, finance development, and capacity building.

Green growth

According to international sustainability leaders, promoting a model of economic growth known as green growth could be a response to the financial crisis arising from COVID-19. The green growth model has the potential to target key aspects of economic performance such as poverty reduction, job creation, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability as well as mobilising climate finance to low-income and middle-income countries. Budgets for low-carbon projects need to be continued, enhanced by incorporating socio-economic benefits such as creating more jobs and generating economic benefits. This could include renewable energy which has already created a lot of green jobs. This should be again combined with an element of income support for unemployed people with the green economy aiding the wider economy.

There is also the opportunity to create green jobs to do with tourism infrastructure, such as reforestation degraded forest landscapes.

COVID-19 has acted as a wake-up call to do more for the planet and for others. The recovery phase should be rolled out in such a way that it accommodates community-based operations, to boost the local economy. This will also mean that people remain in their communities reducing the spread of disease, and people can start earning money and safety nets are creating by doing so. However, there are issues in such arrangements. For example, if people in crowded areas and slums are provided water points, people gather there, and this brings a greater risk of disease spreading.

Thus, the programmes that communities and local governments roll out requires immense interconnected multi-dimensional thinking. We need to look at things differently, such as internal and international cooperation, and commit to socially inclusive policies and sustainable ways of working to inspire green growth to protect natural resources and mankind.

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