

Applying Lessons from COVID-19 Prevention and Risk Reduction to Build a Sustainable and Resilient World

Statement by the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism of the United Nations
Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

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COVID-19 has revealed the precariousness of the systems upon which trade, food, energy, transportation, and social safety nets depend. It is the shortcomings of these very systems which exacerbate the conditions for a virus to emerge, propagate, and become a global catastrophe. This newfound understanding of our interdependence provides the opportunity to create stronger, more resilient local, national and global systems.

Whilst the effects of this risk landscape are felt by all, it is the poorest and most vulnerable who suffer most. And as disasters hit faster and harder, causing further suffering, our budgets are pushed to the breaking point, leading to economic 'rescue' measures to be adopted which further increase risk. If we want to break this vicious cycle, we must embrace the only proven solution: prevention.

Prevention saves lives and upholds a safer, sustainable and resilient future for all.

We urgently need to start applying a preventive, risk-informed focus to all decision making and develop accountability frameworks to support comprehensive risk disclosure and preventive action. Approaches that governments choose can radically transform the sectors that they seek to save and introduce a shift towards risk-aware behaviors and decisions by all of us.

The members of the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism call on all people - but especially government leaders - to reduce risks, save lives, and build a more sustainable world by:

1. Implementing a preventive approach as we build back better.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) provides valuable guidance for building back better with the aim to prevent crises. SFDRR includes biological hazards such as pandemics and is the only globally agreed roadmap for reducing risk. Policy-makers have been slow, however, to heed the call of SFDRR to build comprehensive, multi-hazard strategies and support their implementation with well-capacitated institutions and funding.

Risk-informed development as recommended by SFDRR would, for example, ensure the prioritization of access to goods and services for all in need; require fail-safe systems in trade and supply lines; require that financial and other resources can be allocated on short notice; and encourage members of a community to both be prepared and know where to turn for accurate guidance.

2. Committing to protect the most vulnerable.

A threat to one of us is a threat to all of us. Each individual has the capacity to advance their family, community, and nation. Therefore, we must leave no one behind. A strong commitment to this

principle is needed in our response to COVID-19 and will help build a better and more accessible society and prevent such crises in the future.

3. Strengthening multilateralism based on long-term vision, democratic values, human rights, health equity, accessibility, social justice and respect for nature.

This moment requires a strengthened sense of global solidarity driven by sustainable development. Global systems driven by a financial profit motive, rather than wellbeing, are one of the main causes of fragile, unsustainable development. This need not be so, as exemplified by countless examples of generosity and solidarity and including calls from the private sector to support those affected by the crisis.

4. Providing messaging consistent with medical advice and ensuring that harmful misinformation is quickly countered.

Modern technology and social media have the capacity to inform - or misinform - billions of people in an instant. It is therefore vital that we follow the guidance of experts who provide accurate information, based on data and science, on how best to behave in a crisis. The World Health Organisation has been clear in its recommendations since the beginning of the outbreak. Yet conflicting messages have been sent, whether from a place of false hope or even self-interest. Moreover, decisions taken by leaders must be clear and evidence-based in order to have the greatest impact.

5. Encouraging appropriate individual action.

Each of us must assume our share of responsibility for the wellbeing of the whole and follow the recommendations of the World Health Organisation, national, and local authorities regarding hygiene and physical distancing. Actions consistent with this guidance must be encouraged through clear communication, modeling appropriate behavior, and other approaches.

Crisis leads to opportunity.

Despite the disruption and suffering caused by COVID-19, we are provided with a rare opportunity to develop case studies, lessons learned and policy guidelines on the risk management of the pandemic and share them globally. It also will lead us to revisit much that underpins our modern world – from governance, investment, production and consumption, to our relationship with nature and each other, placing risk reduction at its heart.

By learning from this moment in time and applying long-term prevention and risk reduction approaches now and in the future, we will not only be better prepared and help save lives, but also avoid future crises and set us on a path towards sustainable development and greater resilience.