

LONG CRISIS  
NETWORK



# Shooting the Rapids

COVID-19 and the  
Long Crisis of Globalisation

Alex Evans and David Steven

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*During a transit through whitewater, a boat can take many paths even though the river only flows one way.*

*Many possible journeys end with the destruction of the vessel – on the rocks, hitting the bank, or with the boat capsized and its occupants tipped into the torrent.*

*It is the river, not the paddler, which dictates the speed with which the boat moves. There is no opportunity to take a timeout to rethink strategy or to reverse direction. The only option is to keep paddling, even as rough water makes it harder to control the boat.*

*Above all, the challenge is a collective one: the direction of the boat “depends not on the weakest rower, nor on the strongest, but on the efforts of all the rowers.”*

*It is the capacity to reorganize while undergoing change that ultimately determines the journey’s outcome.*



The Long Crisis of Globalization,  
Alex Evans, Bruce Jones and David Steven,  
The Brookings Institution, 2010



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# Key Findings

## Layer of change

The COVID-19 pandemic marks a turning point in the 21st century – a shock that is characteristic of a long crisis of globalisation where not only opportunities, but risks proliferate rapidly across borders.

The emergency has three levels, each of which is unfolding at its own speed: public health (at least two years), economic (five years or more), polarisation and insecurity (a generation).

## Public health emergency

While we have learned a lot about COVID-19, public health decisions are still being taken in conditions of great uncertainty.

The trajectory of the pandemic will be determined by epidemiological fundamentals that are as yet poorly understood, but also by government effectiveness and legitimacy, patterns of COVID-19 inequality, and the impacts on the pandemic of other shocks such as heatwaves, conflict, and natural disasters.

## The economic crisis

The economic impacts of the pandemic are also still largely hidden. Bailout packages have been large and innovative, but governments will struggle to protect people from the impacts as growth evaporates, supply chains are eroded, and systemic pressures build.

The key questions are whether they can support their citizens in the short term while building a longer-term foundation for reset and recovery, and whether younger workers or older investors will ultimately pay.

## Polarisation and insecurity

Governments entered the crisis with trust depleted and societies polarised. Many are poorly led and coping with high levels of inequality, grievance, and populism. Geopolitical tensions are rising, while fragility is spreading through developing and developed countries.

We do not yet know whether a democratic model for containing the virus will emerge, whether the wave of local mobilisation will be sustained, or if rifts between generations will widen or heal.

### Playbook for collective action

Millions of lives, billions of people's futures, and trillions of dollars depend on whether we opt for a Larger Us approach to the crisis or instead polarise into Them and Us.

To promote collective action, we need to enforce rules proportionately, confront new inequalities, invest in foresight, tell a story of hope, defend the facts, create consensus around solutions, build innovative partnerships, and give everyone a role in the response.

### Plan for international co-operation

Given the complexity of this crisis, agile and adaptable strategies are needed, but an action plan for international co-operation should have four main dimensions:

- ◇ **Firefight better** – by increasing leadership from UN member states, defending the World Health Organization while broadening the global partnership for health, and making prevention and treatment more people-centred as the pandemic spreads into poorer countries.
- ◇ **Make people feel secure** – by reducing conflict risk, tackling insecurity in communities and homes, providing universal safety nets, and creating the psychological conditions needed to support collective action.
- ◇ **Protect critical global infrastructure** – by identifying the institutions and systems that are essential to navigating the long crisis, including food and energy supply chains, international trade, and other systemic risks.
- ◇ **Offer a new deal to a new generation** – by repairing the intergenerational covenant through quality education, jobs for young people, and a move from global peak emissions to a sustained low carbon transformation.

## Introduction

# Coronavirus and the Long Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic marks a turning point in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Chinese government first reported “cases of pneumonia of unknown aetiology” to the World Health Organization (WHO) on 31 December 2019.<sup>1</sup> A week later, the new virus responsible for the disease outbreak was identified. Tightly connected global systems quickly spread the virus across the world. By the time WHO declared a global pandemic in mid-March, 114 countries had reported cases.<sup>2</sup>

Governments everywhere have scrambled to contain not only a public health emergency that could lead to millions of deaths, but also the biggest economic crisis since the 1930s. Below the surface, a profound political, social, and cultural transformation is also underway.

In an interview for World Politics Review, Britain’s former chief emergency planner, Bruce Mann, said that the spread of such a virus “was always going to be horrible”.<sup>3</sup> But in this pandemic, a good rubric for decision making is to *expect the worst*. And to prepare to face it with stretched resources and a workforce that from top to bottom is struggling with infection, exhaustion, isolation, and grief.

The signs of strain are clear. “It’s extraordinary how quickly things move and turn,” one UK government official has said.<sup>4</sup> “There seems to be a narrative from some that there’s a fixed body of evidence on how to deal with things. It’s not like that. It sometimes feels like a game of whack-a-mole.”

The public is also under pressure. People struggle to juggle their response to the crisis and maintain some semblance of mental health. They have had to adapt to remote working and home schooling, to unemployment and isolation. The pandemic is creating new inequalities between and within countries. Life under lockdown is very different in a mansion in the Hamptons than in a shack in a Brazilian favela.<sup>5</sup>

Bill Gates has said that the pandemic pits all of humanity against the virus.<sup>6</sup> From the local to the global, we face decisions about whether to act from narrow *self-interest* or in the wider *collective* interest.

In 2003, the world’s capacity to act collectively hung in the balance in the wake of the disastrous invasion of Iraq. “We have come to a fork in the road,” Secretary-General Kofi Annan told

“It’s extraordinary how quickly things move and turn... It sometimes feels like a game of whack-a-mole.”

the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>7</sup> Seventeen years later, the situation is starker than that: we are on a knife edge, and it is razor sharp. Millions of lives, billions of people’s futures, and trillions of dollars depend on whether we opt for a Larger Us approach to the crisis or instead polarise into Them and Us.<sup>8</sup>

Depending on this choice, one of two futures beckons. A breakdown, where infections and deaths are high, economic impacts are savage, and we turn on each other just when we most need to combine our efforts. Or a breakthrough, where the toll of the pandemic is still heavy, but our capacity for collective action grows.

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A decade ago, Brookings published *Confronting the Long Crisis of Globalization*, a report that we co-authored with Bruce Jones. It warned of a turbulent period for globalisation in which risks would proliferate across borders as rapidly as opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

These risks split into four broad groups. The pressure from long-term *stresses* – such as demographic or environmental change – grows inexorably, but *shocks* are the trigger for sudden change, with consequences ricocheting across interlinked global systems.

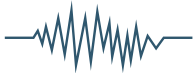
Global vulnerability is exacerbated by *deliberate disruption*, as malign – but innovative – actors probe systems in search of vulnerabilities, as well as by our own tendency to weaken these systems through *stupidity, ignorance, and neglect*.

Navigating the long crisis is like *shooting the rapids*, we argued, a metaphor drawn from Shell’s scenario planning in the 1970s:<sup>10</sup>

*During a transit through whitewater, a boat can take many paths even though the river only flows one way. Many possible journeys end with the destruction of the vessel – on the rocks, hitting the bank, or with the boat capsized and its occupants tipped into the torrent.*

*It is the river, not the paddler, which dictates the speed with which the boat moves. There is no opportunity to take a timeout to rethink strategy or to reverse direction. The only option is to keep paddling, even as rough water makes it harder to control the boat.*

Above all, we argued, the challenge is a collective one. As Scott Barrett puts it, the direction of the boat “depends not on the weakest rower, nor on the strongest, but on the efforts of all the rowers.”<sup>11</sup>



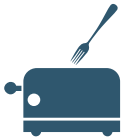
Acute shocks



Longer term stresses



Deliberate disruption



Stupidity, ignorance, neglect



At the heart of the paper was a call for a new 'risk doctrine,' a paradigm for international co-operation that recognises the potential for breakdown while maximising the potential for a breakthrough by investing in mechanisms for the management of shared risk.

This pandemic is the latest in a series of shocks. It was rooted in loss of biodiversity, shifts in farming practices, increased urbanisation, and other stresses associated with economic and social change.<sup>12</sup> Its impacts are already being magnified by disruptive actors – both state and non-state. And the response has been hampered by astonishingly poor leadership in many countries, above all, the President of the United States.

As a result, we find ourselves in an especially perilous stretch of the river. The tempo is now controlled by the virus. Even best-case outcomes will be messy. And those who are willing to row together must resist both the spoilers who actively pursue a path of destruction, and the tendency to retreat into polarisation at a time when so much depends on our ability to work collectively.

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The world did not enter this crisis in good shape.

The last decade has seen a grave erosion in our capacity for collective action. The Trump administration is actively hostile to global systems, while the European Union turned inwards during the Euro crisis and still lacks vision and unity. For the United Kingdom, until recently at least, there has only been Brexit.

Nor are there many glimmers of light beyond the G7. The 2008 crash saw the rise of the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – as major powers. But today, many of the countries that once looked like new global leaders have slid towards authoritarianism, populism, or both.

As a result, geopolitical tensions have grown alarmingly.<sup>13</sup> This is an era of growing tension between China and America – friction that has the potential to degenerate into open conflict.<sup>14</sup> The multilateral system is straining to adapt to these tensions, weakening its capacity to mount the “concerted global, governmental response” that former British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown has called for.<sup>15</sup>

In 2008, the G20 was reshaped from a forum for finance ministers to a platform where leaders of the great and major powers agreed on a “global plan for recovery and reform.”<sup>16</sup> In 2020, with Saudi Arabia and the United States chairing the G20 and G7 respectively, similarly forthright action seems out of the question.

But systemic crises *are* fertile ground for innovations in politics and governance. History is full of conflicts that led to new constitutional settlements, from the Treaty of Westphalia after the Thirty Years War to the United States' Constitution after America's War of Independence.

The world did not enter this crisis in good shape, but systemic crises are fertile for innovations in politics and governance.

Both wars and economic depressions can also lead to sharp reductions in inequality, as the wealthy pay a higher share of taxes and governments intervene to cut the slice of the cake taken by investors.<sup>17</sup> They can also trigger the rebuilding of the social contract, shifting the relationship between government and citizens, capital and labour, and the young and the old.<sup>18</sup>

Past crises have also transformed global governance: the creation of the United Nations (UN) and Bretton Woods system and what would become the European Union (EU) after World War II; the emergence of the G7 from the 1973 oil shock; and the G20 in 2008.

The COVID-19 pandemic, so damaging in the short-term, could also lead to an international breakthrough that reshapes the world for good. As Milton Friedman famously observed, “Only a crisis, actual or perceived, produces real change.”

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A breakthrough in the 2020s will only be possible if a foundation is built in the coming weeks and months.

In the first part of this report, we review three interlocking risks: a public health disaster that is unlikely to end fully for two years; an economic, employment, and financial crisis that will take five years or more to unfold; and a political, social, and cultural dislocation that will transform societies over a generation.

The picture is daunting. As a rule of thumb, the complexity of the threat will continue to increase at roughly the rate that infections spread. Decision makers face being forced to play whack-a-mole for the foreseeable future. Better foresight is needed to help policymakers catch up, creating space to look beyond the urgent to solve longer-term challenges.

This will only be possible if we fertilise the ground from which we expect collective action to grow. After a period of denial, the world’s leaders now accept the seriousness of the threats we face and have begun to learn from each other. Every day, the knowledge they need to confront the pandemic grows. The speed of scientific innovation is dizzying – in public and private sector labs, but also on the frontline in clinics and hospitals.

Outside government, a dynamic, innovative, and diverse response to the pandemic has also gained momentum. In communities across the world, people have not waited for permission. Self-help strategies are proliferating, as they rally to feed, care for, and support those they live close to. Local stakeholders – businesses, communities, and ordinary people – are at the forefront of the emergency response.

This explosion of bottom-up activism may be happening locally, but it is organised on global platforms through a mishmash of “google docs, resource guides, webinars, slack channels, online meetups, peer-to-peer loan programs, and other forms of mutual aid.”<sup>19</sup>

When shooting the rapids, we are most likely to survive the COVID-19 crisis if we empower everyone to row, rather than centralising decision making, scaling up surveillance, and increasing coercion.

And while an unsettling proportion of larger businesses – and whole industries – are currently insolvent, others have rapidly adapted their business models to new realities. The shift towards virtual working is already irreversible. Entrepreneurs are undoubtedly seeding ideas today that will be the Amazons, Googles, and Facebooks of the late 2020s.

The fightback is distributed, and we should build on that. In the rapids, we are most likely to survive the COVID-19 crisis if we empower everyone to row, rather than centralising decision making, scaling up surveillance, and increasing coercion.

Part 2 of this report proposes a vision and practical steps for harnessing the energies of public, private, and non-profit actors and using them to rebuild the political, social, and economic basis for collective action.

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But the central message of the *Long Crisis of Globalization* still holds.

We cannot manage a global crisis without collective action at an international level as well. Leadership is needed from international institutions, both in the short-term and through a vision of what can, and must, be achieved collectively through the course of a decade of action.

We cannot manage a global crisis without collective action at an international level as well.

Solving global challenges involves the actions and beliefs of billions of people.<sup>20</sup> But it also requires effective co-operation between countries, through the world's multilateral institutions, and through the proliferation of networks and partnerships that have emerged to tackle transnational threats.

In the *Long Crisis*, we argued against the siren voices advocating the unravelling of globalisation. “Without effective systems for managing risk at a global level,” we warned, “it will prove impossible to provide prosperity and security for a world of nine billion people. Localized resilience will not be enough, especially as an orderly retreat from globalization is implausible in the extreme.”

COVID-19 has already changed the nature of globalisation, perhaps permanently. When countries began to close their borders due to public health reasons, it was briefly shocking but quickly seemed to most like the only rational course of action. Just as freedom of movement within countries will only return slowly, physical borders between countries will be harder to cross than at any time in the past 50 years.

But, as we argue in the final section of this report, borders must remain porous in a broader sense, reflecting deep patterns of interdependence.

International health co-operation – much of which is happening through networked models, not simply through traditional multilateral institutions – is, of course, an essential priority. The

politicisation of this co-operation – and its emergence as a forum for great power competition – could lead to large numbers of unnecessary deaths during the acute phase of this emergency.<sup>21</sup>

Unprecedented co-operation will also be needed as the economic emergency deepens. Economists have called not for a traditional bailout but for a programme of economic disaster relief that averts “extreme suffering and permanent damage” to the economy.<sup>22</sup>

This is not the time for naivety. During this emergency, global systems will struggle to fulfil all the functions that we might desire of them. International co-operation is needed to help governments firefight better, to provide security at a time when countries and people feel under threat, and to identify and protect the world’s critical global infrastructure at a time when it is close to breakdown.

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However, the urgent should not be allowed to crowd out the important, as it did in 2008.

The UN Secretary-General has called for a plan for the world to recover better.<sup>23</sup> The heart of this plan should be a sustained effort to mitigate the intergenerational impacts of the pandemic and renew the social covenant between old and young.

The world has shut down in order to protect its older people. COVID-19 is also a threat to the young, but their illnesses tend to be milder. If we were all under the world’s median age of thirty, the most effective response might have been to allow the virus to spread, while trying to protect those with pre-existing conditions.

As it is, the young are being asked to sacrifice and step up for the old. The vast majority accept that their parents and grandparents are our immediate priority, but solidarity between the generations must work both ways.

At present, more than 1.5 billion children and young people are out of their schools, colleges, and universities.<sup>24</sup> Many may never catch up on this missed learning, damaging their prospects at a time when economic opportunities will be scarce. At the same time, investment is being redirected away from children’s needs.<sup>25</sup> Even basic immunisation programmes are threatened, with millions of children missing out on vaccines for polio, measles, cholera, and other infectious diseases.<sup>26</sup>

In response, we need a global commitment to quality education, jobs for young people, and stabilising the climate that their futures depend on.

Older generations must support this action, but also be prepared to pay for it. School and university budgets must be protected and not diverted to pay for urgent health needs. A redistribution of

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wealth from older people with assets to younger people with little to their name will be needed. And 2019 must be the definitive peak for greenhouse gas emissions, with stimulus packages directed to promote an accelerating decline.

We call for a Larger Us summit to promote these priorities and to build an ambitious programme of action as part of the Decade of Action on Sustainable Development and to fulfil the Paris Agreement's promise to keep the increase in global temperatures well below dangerous levels.

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COVID-19 is the greatest systemic crisis that all but the oldest citizens around the world have lived through. It hit when many institutions and the social fabric were already looking worn.

We now face one of two futures: a breakdown, where infections and deaths are very high, economic impacts are savage, and we turn on each other just when we most need to combine our efforts; or a breakthrough, where the toll of the pandemic is still heavy, but our capacity for collective action grows.

The major powers will not shape this reimagining on their own, and they may actively oppose it. New forms of co-operation will therefore be needed that draw on new sources of leadership, that bind together states in what will often be uneasy alliances, and that thoroughly blur the line between state and non-state actors.

Which of these paths we take will be the result of a choice – or the aggregation of choices made by thousands of political leaders, millions of organisations and groups, and billions of people. As the long crisis of globalisation deepens, we are all the authors of a story being written in real time. And we still have time to make it a tale of hope rather than of tragedy.

Whether we face a breakdown or breakthrough depends on choices made by thousands of political leaders, millions of organisations and groups, and billions of people.

## Part 1

# Risks in the Age of COVID-19

## Layers of Change

In the 1990s, Stewart Brand – editor of the Whole Earth Catalog and one of the founders of the Long Now Foundation – proposed the concept of “layers of change.”<sup>27</sup> A building, for example, is filled with ephemeral *stuff* (“things that twitch around monthly”), has *services* that must be replaced every decade, and has a *structure* that could last a century or more.

The 2008 shock had three of Brand’s layers of change.

The first layer – the immediate financial crisis – lasted for a couple of years. Initially, as liquidity vanished, there was complacency. At a summit in Spring 2007, at which we presented, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, then head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), reassured a group of national and international leaders that the worst was over. Lehman Brothers collapsed six months later. But after a slow start, politicians sprang into action. Leaders love a good crisis, and the drama, media attention, and sense of purpose that it brings.<sup>28</sup> A global economic breakdown was averted.

The second layer – a broader economic crisis – moved more slowly, with the Eurozone debt crisis not brought under control until mid-2012 when Mario Draghi made his famous promise that the European Central Bank would do “whatever it takes to preserve the Euro.”<sup>29</sup> The international response was fragmented, while Eurozone governments squabbled among themselves and with the IMF. Ordinary people suffered greatly as austerity measures cut public services to the bone.<sup>30</sup>

But it was the third and slowest layer – a crisis of polarisation, institutional breakdown, and insecurity – that caused the most insidious and most persistent damage. Confidence in governments and the media collapsed.<sup>31</sup> By 2019, fewer than half of people across 27 different countries said they trusted either. Civic space – the ability of citizens to organise, participate, and communicate – shrank dramatically, with 83% of the world’s people now living in countries classed as “closed”, “repressed”, or “obstructed.”<sup>32</sup>

Politics became significantly more polarised.<sup>33</sup> Economic factors fed feelings of relative deprivation. Different ‘values tribes’ emerged in many societies, while anxiety and fear of change grew. Societies found themselves more vulnerable to deliberate disruption. Politicians in the 2000s focused primarily on the risk

from non-state actors, above all Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. In the past decade, it has been states – Russia, above all – that have been the disruptors *par excellence*, moving expertly to use social media to sow outrage, fan polarisation, and weaponise citizens’ fears.

Little action was taken to counter these threats. This gave populists free rein as governments, traditional political parties, and international institutions stuck their heads deep into the sand. The consequences were easy to see coming. In 2009, we warned that collapsing trust was creating conditions in which “populist movements are certain to thrive”.<sup>34</sup>

The three layers of crisis did not unfold sequentially. They progressed *simultaneously* but at *different speeds*, with each layer influencing the others. The perception that the bailout had favoured the ‘banksters’ poisoned public trust.<sup>35</sup> Loss of trust, and subsequent political polarisation, made it harder to stabilise economies. Few now remember that the word ‘Brexit’ was first coined in the midst of the Eurocrisis as a play on ‘Grexit’.<sup>36</sup>

In this pandemic, decision makers need to understand visible, emerging, and hidden risks, and to use this understanding to sustain risk management strategies over the timescales needed to respond to this crisis.

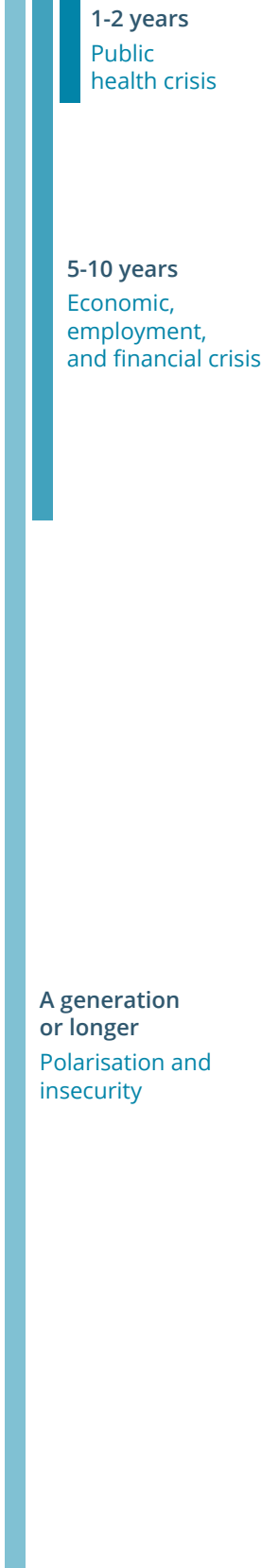
## COVID-19’s Layers of Change

COVID-19 was not a black swan. Pandemics were already at the top of national risks registers, and the world had various dry runs with bird flu, swine flu, SARS, MERS, and Marburg. Countries such as Singapore learned lessons from SARS.<sup>37</sup> Others had undertaken pandemic preparedness exercises that identified weaknesses in their preparations, such as the likelihood that health systems would be overwhelmed.<sup>38</sup>

But in 2019, a review of global health security concluded that “no country is fully prepared to handle an epidemic or pandemic.”<sup>39</sup> More worryingly, this review assessed the United States, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands as being most prepared – given these countries’ difficulties in tackling the pandemic, this suggests there are significant weaknesses in our understanding of what readiness looks like.

Moreover, these exercises focused almost exclusively on health impacts and systems. In the decade that followed the 2009 swine flu pandemic, planners had become increasingly convinced by the need for aggressive social distancing measures.<sup>40</sup> The economic consequences of the imposition of these measures on a global basis had not been sufficiently assessed.

The broader social, political, and security dimensions of a pandemic had also been underplayed. In the United States, government experts complained that decisions were being



made on intuition, ignoring 15 years of institutional learning.<sup>41</sup> China's response was delayed by a cover up and some argue that it continues to believe that "controlling the narrative is more important than the public health or the economic fallout."<sup>42</sup> Many other countries have struggled to balance political pressures to keep economies open with mounting evidence of the speed of the pandemic's spread.

Security was a notable blind spot. The United States' national security strategy acknowledges the potential for a pandemic to undermine confidence in government institutions but does not consider that this might lead to insecurity or state failure, or increase the space in which terrorists or transnational criminal groups can operate. When he became National Security Advisor, John Bolton disbanded the Global Health Security and Biodefense unit.<sup>43</sup>

The UN Security Council deemed both HIV/AIDS<sup>44</sup> and Ebola<sup>45</sup> as threatening the security of conflict-affected states but has only belatedly considered that a pandemic could be a much broader threat to global peace and security.<sup>46</sup> *Pathways for Peace*, the UN-World Bank flagship report on conflict prevention, saw epidemics as a localised risk for already fragile states, not as a global threat to stability even in countries with effective institutions.<sup>47</sup>

This is not a time to look backwards. But is important to learn from past mistakes, accept the extent of current uncertainty about the future, and to ground policy in an assessment of future risks. This will increase foresight, widen horizons beyond immediate public health challenges, and help build a platform for action that can be sustained over time.

### *Layer 1: The Public Health Crisis*

The pandemic is still in an early phase. The immediate public health emergency is likely to last for two years or longer, the time in which it will take for enough people to be infected or vaccinated to reach herd immunity.\* Even this timescale assumes that an effective and safe vaccine will be discovered or that immunity is achieved and persists.<sup>48</sup>

During this phase, we have learned four broad lessons.

#### **We know a lot, but not enough to take confident decisions.**

Policymakers have access to substantial quantities of scientific data and analysis. In May 2020, more than 63,000 research articles on COVID-19 had been collected in an open source database.<sup>49</sup> But significant uncertainties remain in data that decision makers rely on, including the total number of infections

*"National health security is fundamentally weak around the world, and no country is fully prepared to handle an epidemic or pandemic."*

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\* Somewhere in the range of 40-80% depending on the R0 or basic reproduction number of COVID-19.



and deaths, the fatality rate, the role played by asymptomatic transmissions, the acquisition and duration of immunity, and the threshold for herd immunity. So far, these uncertainties have proliferated, as excess mortality data reveal large numbers of undetected deaths<sup>50</sup> and evidence builds of the complexity of the virus's impact on people's health.<sup>51</sup>

### Governments have mostly made the same wager on hard lockdowns.

Influenced by China's model, countries have tended to switch from doing nothing to unprecedented restrictions on freedom of movement and association.<sup>52</sup> Among the outliers, Sweden<sup>53</sup> and the Netherlands<sup>54</sup> have adopted a more *laissez faire* approach. Historically, publics have resisted coercive public health measures, but in the early phase of this pandemic there has been considerable popular demand for government intervention.<sup>55</sup> Lockdowns, however, have been implemented in haste and often designed poorly.<sup>56</sup> Continued public consent cannot be taken for granted, especially in countries where levels of polarisation are high.<sup>57</sup>

### Lockdowns may only offer a temporary respite.

Only a few countries have unwound their lockdowns and attempted to move onto a new phase. It is too early to determine how vulnerable they are to a second wave of infections, but some have already faced a new surge.<sup>58</sup> Mass testing, tracking, tracing, quarantine, and continued behavioural change might offer a route out of tight restrictions, but societies could also face repeated waves of spike-lockdown-relax until herd immunity is established.<sup>59</sup> Until a vaccine becomes available, the best case could resemble an accelerated version of the HIV/AIDS pandemic where distancing (safe sex) was followed by widespread testing and vastly improved treatments.<sup>60</sup>

### States have tended to go it alone rather co-operate internationally.

While scientific and medical co-operation has been intense, governments have influenced each other but have not acted in concert. An unedifying scramble for testing kits, ventilators, and protective equipment has become a major source of contention between countries and, in the United States, between states and the federal government. The European Commission drafted a "coordinated exit strategy" for ending lockdowns but was forced not to publish it by EU member states.<sup>61</sup> In the United States, there are marked differences in strategy between red and blue states.

Looking forward, key variables and risks include:

- ◇ **Epidemiological fundamentals** – whether infections and deaths are at the high or low end of expectations, as models are refined and informed by better data, new treatments and non-pharmaceutical interventions are introduced, the immune response is better understood, and a vaccine is developed, tested, licensed, and distributed.<sup>62</sup>
- ◇ **Government effectiveness and legitimacy** – how governments perform as their decision making catches up with the pace of the pandemic, whether they maintain public consent for restrictions on freedom of movement, and the extent to which they start to act in concert, at least within regions that share common land borders.
- ◇ **Patterns of COVID-19 inequality** – between richer countries with stronger institutions but older populations, and poorer countries that have younger populations but a higher existing burden of disease, weaker health systems, and less effective institutions, and within countries as divides emerge between rich and poor, women and men, old and young, and majority and marginalised ethnic groups.
- ◇ **Impacts on the pandemic of other shocks and stresses** – including heatwaves, which will make it dangerous for people to be confined to their houses, and natural disasters and conflicts, which could lead to sudden population movements that will create new health, humanitarian, and political risks.



# Public health

## ▶ Current Situation May 2020

- ◇ Pandemic affecting all countries – millions of infections, 300,000+ deaths.<sup>63</sup>
  - ◇ Three broad groups of countries: peaked and trying to prevent a second wave (mostly in Asia), peaking and exiting lockdown (Europe, North America), yet to peak (Latin America, Africa).
  - ◇ Half of the world's population have been locked down.<sup>64</sup>
  - ◇ Four predominant response models: attempt to eradicate (e.g. China, Korea, New Zealand); flatten the curve but accept endemic infections (Europe); move to herd immunity (Sweden); erratic strategies (United States, Brazil).
  - ◇ Mass displacement of people – both international and internal (e.g. in India<sup>65</sup>).
  - ◇ Sporadic protests and social unrest triggered by poorly designed lockdowns.
  - ◇ Humanitarian crisis in care homes, prisons, refugee camps, other forgotten places.
  - ◇ Growing understanding of the complexity of health impacts – pulmonary, cardiovascular, renal, intestinal, neurological, etc.<sup>66</sup>
  - ◇ Race to scale up testing, number of intensive care beds, a community health response, etc.
  - ◇ Shortages of/competition for supplies of protective equipment, testing kits, etc.
  - ◇ Systems weakened as people become infected – from leadership level to frontline.
- 

## ▶▶ Future Uncertainties

- ◇ 100m to 7bn infections. 1m+ to 40m deaths.<sup>67</sup>
- ◇ Extent of longer-term sickness after infection.<sup>68</sup>
- ◇ Effectiveness of test, trace, and isolate strategies in countries with different levels of capacity.<sup>69</sup>
- ◇ Public compliance with public health restrictions.
- ◇ Non COVID-19 burden of disease (untreated illnesses, missed vaccinations, health impacts of increased poverty and hunger).
- ◇ Existence and length of immunity.
- ◇ Better treatments or increases in capacity of health systems to respond.
- ◇ Potential for health systems to collapse in some countries.
- ◇ Development and distribution of a vaccine.
- ◇ Growing inequality in health outcomes, impact of lockdown – between and within countries.
- ◇ Health impacts of interactions with other stresses and shocks – heatwaves, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.

## Layer 2: The Economic Crisis

Economic impacts were largely excluded from pandemic planning and are already much worse than analysts predicted early in the spread of COVID-19.

On 16 March 2020, Goldman Sachs forecast that the United States' economy would contract by 5% in Q2 2020.<sup>71</sup> Just four days later, it revised its estimate to a projected 24% drop, far worse than even the multi-quarter declines seen after the 2008/9 financial crisis.<sup>72</sup> Vast swathes of economic activity have come to a halt, with lockdowns affecting 2.7 billion workers.<sup>73</sup> As veteran investor Mohamed El-Erian put it, "this is a generation-defining moment. I've never seen an economic stop on this scale, never in big countries and all at once."<sup>74</sup> The IMF has described this as a "crisis like no other" and expects "the worst economic fallout since the Great Depression."<sup>75</sup>

Four lessons can be drawn from what remains a chaotic and fast-moving picture.

### Countries entered the crisis in bad shape.

Before the crisis, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) expected global GDP to grow by less than 3% in 2019 and projected no improvement in 2020.<sup>76</sup> Its Secretary-General warned of a "long-term future of low growth and declining living standards" after a period of underinvestment, rising trade tensions, and the impact of longer-term stresses such as climate change.<sup>77</sup> The surge in developing country debt had been the "largest, fastest and most broad-based in nearly five decades" with the World Bank noting that similar waves of indebtedness had ended in a financial crisis.<sup>78</sup> Emerging markets have already seen capital outflows far higher than in the 2008 financial crisis, with investors removing \$83.3bn in March.<sup>79</sup>

### Economic impacts are still largely hidden.

Corporate debt was at record levels before the pandemic hit and 40 percentage points higher than at the onset of the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>80</sup> A significant proportion of businesses are already technically insolvent, but few have yet declared bankruptcy.<sup>81</sup> Whole industries – airlines,<sup>82</sup> hotels,<sup>83</sup> and retail,<sup>84</sup> for example – may no longer be viable in their current form. Many jobs have permanently disappeared, but workers may still expect to return to them. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 1.25 billion workers are in sectors such as manufacturing, food services, and retail where job losses are most likely.<sup>85</sup> Low-paid and low-skilled workers and those in informal employment face the greatest risks, it says. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is projecting that trade will decline by up to a third, and that even in the best case it will take months for global supply chains to return to normal.<sup>86</sup> Demand for

*"The bleak outlook applies to advanced and developing economies alike. This crisis knows no boundaries. Everybody hurts."*

Kristalina Georgieva, IMF  
Managing Director<sup>70</sup>

shipping has fallen sharply,<sup>87</sup> while energy markets have come close to meltdown.<sup>88</sup>

### A humanitarian emergency is unfolding.

Most families do not have the reserves to withstand an extended period of enforced unemployment. Worst-case scenarios project that 420 million people could be pushed below the \$1.90 per day poverty line.<sup>89</sup> Before the pandemic, 820 million people were hungry and 113 million suffering acute food insecurity.<sup>90</sup> Based on experience from the 2014 Ebola outbreak, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has warned that “effects on food security could be rapid and of dramatic proportions.”<sup>91</sup> The World Food Programme (WFP) has warned of a famine of “biblical proportions” based on projections showing that 300,000 people per day could die of hunger over a three month period.<sup>92</sup> Rich countries are also reporting steep increases in hunger, with 1.5 million Britons reporting they went a day without eating in the first three weeks of lockdown.<sup>93</sup> A coalition of multinational food companies, farmers’ groups, and civil society organisations have warned that transport disruptions, export restrictions, and labour shortages are damaging “food security in many locations and food prices in some.”<sup>94</sup>

### Bailout packages have been bigger, faster, and more innovative than expected.<sup>95</sup>

As Nouriel Roubini comments, governments have “already done in less than a month what took them three years to do after the financial crisis.”<sup>96</sup> In April 2020, countries had already announced \$3.3 trillion of spending and revenue measures, and \$4.5 trillion of loans, equity support, and guarantees.<sup>97</sup> According to the IMF, emergency support measures have had three broad objectives: keeping essential services and sectors running, providing resources directly to households that have been hit by the crisis, and trying to prevent lasting damage by protecting “the web of relations among workers and employers, producers and consumers, lenders and borrowers.”<sup>98</sup> Governments have implemented a range of people-centred measures such as job guarantees,<sup>99</sup> cash transfers,<sup>100</sup> and debt relief.<sup>101</sup> Some steps have been taken to protect developing countries, including a proposed G20 debt freeze<sup>102</sup> and increased access to an emergency facility for the 90 countries that have approached the IMF for financing.<sup>103</sup>

Economic uncertainty is now at a record high and dwarfs levels seen during SARS and the Ebola outbreak.<sup>104</sup> The main dimensions include:

- ◇ **The resilience of global supply chains** – whether productive capacity and trade flows can be protected so that, as the WTO Director-General has warned, “vital products do not become unaffordable for consumers.”<sup>105</sup>

- ◇ **The extent of systemic pressures** – whether increased liquidity since the 2008 financial crisis is enough to protect the financial system from contagion, or whether financial institutions stop lending and trigger a new credit crunch for businesses,<sup>106</sup> while “a cascade of disorderly sovereign defaults” prevents developing countries from responding to the pandemic.<sup>107</sup>
- ◇ **How COVID-19 changes economic activity** – whether a globalised economy can simply be switched back on or whether the economy will be permanently transformed as the pandemic acts as the equivalent of “a negative permanent technology shock”<sup>108</sup>
- ◇ **The short-term effectiveness of government policy responses** – whether mitigation measures protect vulnerable people and economies, or whether governments find that they cannot get money into people’s pockets fast enough or without it being diverted by vested interests or corruption.<sup>109</sup>
- ◇ **...and their longer-term effectiveness** – whether emergency measures provide a robust foundation for an economic reset and recovery, or whether high levels of indebtedness or a lack of political will leave many countries unable to sustain a fiscal stimulus.<sup>110</sup>
- ◇ **The implications of increased government control of the economy** – given the potential for a wave of nationalisations, and the number of people who could be supported through job guarantees and new tools such as universal basic income.
- ◇ **How bailout packages will be paid for** – whether countries can borrow without raising interest rates<sup>111</sup> or monetise the cost of the bailouts without triggering inflation.<sup>112</sup>
- ◇ **...and who will pay for them** – whether the burden will fall on richer and older people with high asset ownership or on the younger workers who suffered disproportionate pain from austerity after the 2008 financial crisis.



# Economic

## ► Current Situation May 2020

- ◇ Economies frozen by lockdowns, collapse in consumer demand. Global output projected to shrink by 3% or more. Negative growth in 170 countries.<sup>113</sup>
  - ◇ High and growing proportion of labour force unemployed or furloughed. Projections of 195 million job losses.<sup>114</sup>
  - ◇ Sporadic panic buying, temporary shortages, elements of rationing especially when poorer communities are locked down.
  - ◇ Early wave of bankruptcies (but many more businesses probably insolvent).<sup>115</sup> Corporate bailouts and some nationalisations.
  - ◇ Financial market volatility in equities, bonds, commodities at levels equivalent to or above the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>116</sup> Record outflows from emerging markets.<sup>117</sup>
  - ◇ Over 90 countries have called for emergency financing from the IMF.<sup>118</sup>
  - ◇ Greater fiscal response from G20 than in 2008 financial crisis, although variations between high (Japan, South Africa, Australia) and low spenders (India, Mexico, Argentina, etc. – also China).<sup>119</sup>
  - ◇ Greater use of people-centred policies, including job guarantees, loan guarantees, increased unemployment benefits, etc.
- 

## ►► Future Uncertainties

- ◇ Impacts of successive waves of COVID-19 infections on economic growth.
- ◇ Number of people pushed into poverty: 1-8% of global population.<sup>120</sup>
- ◇ How well global supply chains functions for food, etc. – which may run at 70-75% of capacity.<sup>121</sup>
- ◇ Ability to meet the food needs of 265 million people either already facing starvation or vulnerable in 2020.<sup>122</sup>
- ◇ Impacts of commodity price volatility on energy, natural resource exporters – with prices well below the fiscal breakeven point for multiple countries.<sup>123</sup>
- ◇ Number of new import, export, and investment restrictions.<sup>124</sup>
- ◇ Number of sovereign debt defaults and extent of debt forgiveness. Related risks – e.g. in the Eurozone.
- ◇ Systemic risks in the financial sector and potential credit crunch in the non-financial sector.
- ◇ Whether countries sustain their bailouts and fiscal stimulus – and % that reaches the most vulnerable.
- ◇ Impact of lower tax revenues on public services and possible loss of core government functions (e.g. if health workers or teachers are not paid).
- ◇ Ability to protect aid flows due to cuts or due to lower national income in donor countries.

### *Layer 3: Polarisation and Insecurity*

Governments entered the crisis with trust levels depleted and their societies polarised.<sup>125</sup> Many are poorly led and coping with high levels of inequality, grievance, and populism. Meanwhile, COVID-19 has spurred profound changes in how we live and relate to each other, including huge shifts in work, education, and relationships. We face profound psychological challenges as we confront the loneliness, anxiety, boredom, and grief that come with lockdowns and loss.<sup>126</sup>

As we saw after the 2008 financial crisis, these shifts will unfold over a long period of time, transforming societies and the way that they relate to each other internationally. The shifts will be driven by the pandemic and its economic fallout but will also determine how effectively the world responds to the public health and economic risks it faces.

It is difficult to understand what is happening on this layer of the crisis, although some publicly available datasets are now available to track public attitudes and values.<sup>127</sup> Research tracking grievances among groups defined by age, class, ethnicity, or other markers is especially sparse. For a relatively modest budget (at least when compared to the money being spent on medical research), policymakers could be provided access to quantitative and qualitative data that allows them to understand the shifting markers of privilege and status, and to analysis that tracks the distributional implications of the COVID-19 response.

#### **Public confidence in governments was low before the crisis.**

Before the pandemic, substantial minorities did not trust health advice from the government.<sup>128</sup> In developed countries, more than half of the public lacked confidence in the future and believed that capitalism causes more harm than good.<sup>129</sup> To date, majorities in 13 out of 17 countries trust their government's handling of the pandemic, but government failures in responding to the epidemic will come under increasingly intense scrutiny.<sup>130</sup> It may matter less what majorities think than the attitudes of groups who feel a sense of exclusion, especially if impacts fall disproportionately on the less wealthy and educated groups who tend to be most sceptical about their institutions.<sup>131</sup> Multiple stresses that people face will also have psychological implications, pushing them further into fight-or-flight responses, in the process making them more anxious, irritable, hyper-vigilant, and prone to 'othering'.<sup>132</sup>

#### **Polarisation is increasing and this could fuel insecurity.**

Rival political factions are already deep into blame games in many countries, most notably the United States, especially in electoral contexts such as Wisconsin's state elections in April.<sup>133</sup> Scapegoating of migrants and refugees has been seen in Europe,



China, and elsewhere.<sup>134</sup> Polarisation is also spreading between countries, as in Italy's "massive shift" towards Euroscepticism.<sup>135</sup> COVID-19 will increase inequalities between groups, fuelling grievances and undermining social cohesion. In many countries, ethnic minorities have poorer health, worse housing to shelter in, and are more likely to have poorly paid frontline jobs.<sup>136</sup> Polarisation between the young and old may also increase. Grievances are most likely to fuel insecurity when government institutions are perceived to be failing.<sup>137</sup> The result could be an increase in fragility in all countries, not just those that entered the pandemic on various lists of fragile states.<sup>138</sup>

### Coronavirus creates new opportunities for deliberate disruption.

Populists like Donald Trump have grasped the opportunity of painting COVID-19 as a "Chinese virus".<sup>139</sup> China's propaganda operation is running at full steam and pushing out conspiracy theories.<sup>140</sup> Russian media and trolling operations are spreading fake news and misinformation to attack social cohesion in the West, with a potential flashpoint around the United States' election.<sup>141</sup> Extremist groups are exploiting conspiracy theories, such as a purported link between COVID-19 and 5G telecoms networks,<sup>142</sup> the claim that mass vaccination will be used to implant people with tracking chips,<sup>143</sup> or that the pandemic was created to discredit President Trump.<sup>144</sup> COVID-19's origins in China have also been incorporated into Islamist propaganda related to the oppression of the Uighurs.<sup>145</sup> In the past decade, disruptive actors have proven more effective than governments and traditional political parties in understanding popular grievances and the social networks in which these grievances fester. A fast-moving emergency will provide them with plentiful space in which to operate.

While many trends are negative, the world is experiencing a surge of bottom-up, locally self-organised action to meet community needs and care for vulnerable people.

### Coronavirus is transforming how people relate to each other at a local level.

While many trends are negative, the world is experiencing a surge of bottom-up, locally self-organised action to meet community needs and care for vulnerable people. Countries such as Sierra Leone are drawing on local action models developed during the Ebola outbreak.<sup>146</sup> Other countries have seen a fresh surge of volunteering: when the UK asked for volunteers, almost a million people signed up in days.<sup>147</sup> Local efforts are increasingly networked together at national or global levels.<sup>148</sup> But these early efforts could fail as an initial wave of enthusiasm is exhausted, or they could be sustained through top-down support, as funds start to flow and civil society's major players work to build a robust backbone.<sup>149</sup>

Looking forward, key uncertainties surrounding this layer include:

- ◇ **The extent to which geopolitical tensions increase.** The pandemic has increased friction between the United

States and China – a trend that is likely to continue whatever the result of the 2020 United States’ presidential election.<sup>150</sup> Hard security risks may increase between other states, as nationalist backlashes provide the popular support needed to nourish a period of intensified geopolitical competition.<sup>151</sup>

- ◇ **Whether governments and other institutions can weather the storm.** It remains to be seen whether states will be able to handle the damage and loss of confidence through natural renewal processes (like electing a new government or national unity coalitions), or whether legitimacy vanishes for the long term as trust reaches critical levels. Even where lockdowns are successful and death rates are lower than projected, governments face criticism for overreacting, with ‘Lockdown Sceptics’ mobilising using lessons learned from climate denial and anti-vaccination campaigns.<sup>152</sup>
- ◇ **The extent of insecurity within countries.** The pandemic has already triggered a wave of demonstrations and protests on the one hand, and government repression and abuses on the other.<sup>153</sup> Many, if not most countries, will experience increased protest, testing their capacity to process this contestation peacefully. Some countries will almost certainly experience disorderly regime change. Much will depend on how many are vulnerable and the extent to which contagion is seen across national borders, as occurred during the Arab Spring.
- ◇ **Whether a democratic model of containment can emerge.** Governments can manage the coronavirus either through citizen empowerment or through totalitarian surveillance and control.<sup>154</sup> China has made a major play on the latter, deploying millions of face-recognising cameras and tracking both carriers and social contacts, and is now touting this model globally. However, some countries – Germany or South Korea, for example – may be demonstrating the success of more open and democratic approaches to addressing the public health and economic emergencies.
- ◇ **What happens to the wave of social mobilisation.** While many governments have focused their communications mainly on what citizens should not do (touch their faces, meet their friends, buy too much or too little), it is clear that many citizens want to help.<sup>155</sup> But it remains to be seen whether this is a genuine signal of a new beginning, or a flash in the pan that quickly burns out.
- ◇ **Whether rifts between generations and other groups widen or heal.** Coronavirus demands that young people take a huge economic (and social) hit so as to protect the elderly and other vulnerable groups. So far, they have largely accepted this. But key uncertainties remain both about whether they will continue to do so as lockdowns grind on and the Northern Hemisphere summer approaches, and about whether older people will reciprocate by recognising the need to pay a fair share of the costs of financing bailouts.

What all of these dynamics have in common is their relevance to our capacity to take *collective action* to tackle coronavirus and its consequences – at all levels from local to global. As we will see in the next part of the paper, this is perhaps where our single most important test will lie.



# Polarisation and insecurity

## ▶ Current Situation May 2020

- ◇ Publics tiring of lockdowns as financial stresses, boredom, and anxiety mount up. Willingness to adhere to social distancing declining in multiple countries.<sup>156</sup>
  - ◇ Early signs of protest, unrest, rioting, in some cases with organised crime.<sup>157</sup>
  - ◇ Attacks on health workers in some countries.<sup>158</sup>
  - ◇ Violence and abuses *by* police and security forces in multiple countries.<sup>159</sup> Violence *against* police in some countries.<sup>160</sup>
  - ◇ Spikes in domestic violence. UNFPA forecasts 15 million additional domestic violence incidents for every three months of lockdown.<sup>161</sup>
  - ◇ Scapegoating of minorities such as refugees, homeless, prisoners.
  - ◇ Governments under strain and already losing trust, confidence, and goodwill.<sup>162</sup>
  - ◇ Polarised attitudes towards lockdowns. Politicisation of the World Health Organization.<sup>163</sup>
  - ◇ US, China, Russia, and other countries fuelling polarisation while seeking to shift blame and win legitimacy and power.
  - ◇ Surge in local self-organised responses and volunteering.
  - ◇ Global Ceasefire signed by 12 conflict parties,<sup>164</sup> but with weak support from the UN Security Council.<sup>165</sup>
- 

## ▶▶ Future Uncertainties

- ◇ Whether levels of public support are maintained for emergency measures (public health economic bailout, in a food crisis, if financial systems come under serious strain, etc.).
- ◇ Levels of trust in government, frontline actors such as the police, and other institutions.
- ◇ Levels of trust between countries – at elite and public levels.
- ◇ Extent to which psychological factors – stress, depression, loneliness, mental health problems – fuel ‘fight or flight’ responses.
- ◇ Discrimination and stigmatisation of marginalised groups. Levels of grievance within these groups.
- ◇ Intergenerational rifts.
- ◇ Delays in elections. Increases in authoritarian responses.
- ◇ Numbers of protests and levels of civil disorder. Contestation of government power by armed or criminal groups.
- ◇ State failures as states run out of money and/or bandwidth.
- ◇ Geopolitical tensions, including between China and the US.
- ◇ Divisions in or fragmentation of regional groupings, such as the EU.
- ◇ New refugee crises, with spikes in anti-immigrant sentiment.

## Part 2:

# Collective Action in the Age of Coronavirus

## A Strategy for Resilience

In *Confronting the Long Crisis of Globalization*, we encouraged policymakers to “take the idea of failure seriously, puncturing the polite fiction that serious reversals are highly unlikely, if not impossible” and warned that the very real risk of catastrophe had exerted little influence on policy outcomes.<sup>166</sup>

The *Long Crisis* argued that, in an interdependent world, the central goal of international co-operation should be resilience, through strategies that provided globalisation with the capacity to withstand shocks, manage longer-term stresses, and defend against disruptive actors undermining the systems on which we depend.

The 2000s saw an intensifying policy focus on a small group of fragile states, but the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed fragility in all countries and at levels from the global to the local. As we have shown in the survey of risks in the first part of this paper, we are probably just at the beginning of discovering the extent of our collective vulnerabilities. Things are likely to get a lot worse.

As the risk of breakdown becomes increasingly obvious, calls to invest in resilience will grow. It is important that this should lead to more than a simplistic debate about readiness – whether countries should have had more hospital beds or ventilators, for example. Given the global nature of the risks we face, this crisis requires a shift towards risk management as a core role of government and one that can only be discharged through collective action.

A high-resilience system encourages foresight, shares the burden of managing risk, encourages innovation and co-operation, and is resistant to disruptive actors that aim to undermine the basis for co-operation. In contrast, a low-resilience system is absorbed by firefighting the most immediate crisis, places the burden of risks on actors who are least equipped to manage them, and is prone to increasing polarisation and conflict.

A strategy for resilience builds a commitment to collective action that *delivers lasting benefits*, while *stimulating the will to co-operate*. This does not simply happen. It requires effective leadership, broad participation, an investment in building alliances and networks, and clear communication of problems, solutions, and successes.



### High Resilience

Risks – and response to risks – are evenly distributed

Shared awareness of problems and solutions

Short *and* long-term thinking

Co-operative structures foster innovation and resist free-riding and predation

COVID-19 strategies must be agile and adaptable, delivering immediate results while increasing potential for renewal and rebuilding. When shooting the rapids, the aim is to increase scope for future action, rather than to shut off possible futures or exclude groups from the process of rebuilding.<sup>167</sup>

In the introduction, we described a COVID-19 knife edge – with a Larger Us or collective action response on one side and a Them and Us polarisation on the other. This knife edge leads to starkly different outcomes.

A polarised response increases the risks of a breakdown scenario, including:

- ◇ **Public health emergency.** Public health responses remain fragmented and uncoordinated, with governments seeing countries that implement less aggressive restrictions as a growing threat to the health of their population. Border controls are normalised and competition for medical supplies becomes commonplace. During successive waves of infections, public consent for controls becomes harder to maintain as the legitimacy of public institutions is undermined. Deaths are on the higher end of current projections, especially in poorer countries. An eventual vaccination programme is inequitable and slow to roll out, leading to the imposition of quarantine measures on poorer countries with unvaccinated populations.<sup>168</sup>
- ◇ **Economic crisis.** Governments fail to mount the rescue effort needed in the face of an unprecedented economic depression, leading to financial crisis, sovereign debt default, a wave of bankruptcies, and mass unemployment. Global supply chains are permanently damaged and barriers to international trade substantially elevated. As in the 1930s, economic nationalism becomes the new norm, undermining other aspects of international co-operation. Poverty and inequality increase in all countries, fuelling grievances that are exploited by populists and other disruptive actors. A humanitarian emergency unfolds in some countries or regions, and in ‘forgotten places’ such as slums and refugee camps across the world.
- ◇ **Polarisation and insecurity.** Most governments fail to survive COVID-19 as the social contract breaks down between government and citizen. They are voted out of office or are subject to coups or revolutions, with power contestation remaining elevated. As in the Arab Spring, political consequences are highly unpredictable, with destabilising forces proliferating across borders. Some governments cede territory and control to armed or criminal groups, both in border and peripheral areas and in deprived parts of cities. Competition increases for land, natural resources, and government services.<sup>169</sup> Weakened institutions, increased



#### Low Resilience

The burden of risks falls on those least able to mitigate them

Lack of consensus and polarised responses

Future is heavily discounted

Function and capacity is lost and systems are vulnerable to deliberate disruption

polarisation between groups, and abuses by security and justice actors create increased risks of insecurity and violent conflict. The international system is increasingly dominated by the security threats posed by intensifying competition between the great and major powers.

## Principles for Collective Action on COVID-19

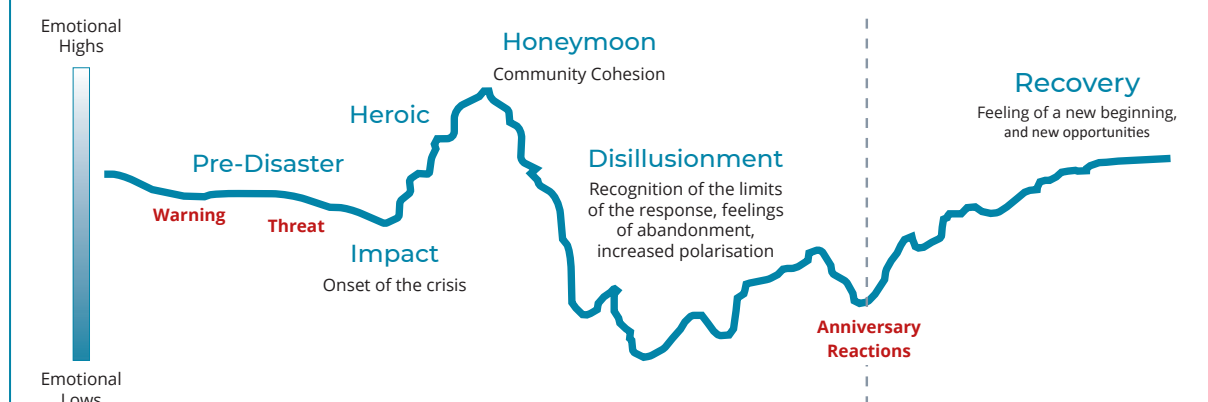
Four drivers will determine the extent to which a negative scenario unfolds or whether, by contrast, we see a shift from low to high resilience, and from breakdown to breakthrough:

- ◇ **Risk sharing** – whether health, economic, and security risks are concentrated or perceived to be shared fairly.
- ◇ **Longer horizons** – whether the horizon for making decisions and implementing policies shrinks or grows.
- ◇ **Shared awareness** – whether strategies are fractured, or consensus builds over both problems and solutions.
- ◇ **Shared platforms** – whether innovative partnerships emerge that solve problems, strengthen the basis for collective action, and marginalise disruptive actors.

Collectively, these drivers will help promote Larger Us thinking and action, through an informal coalition that stretches beyond governments and traditional multilateral organisations to include businesses, civil society organisations, and ultimately the beliefs and behaviours of billions of people. Co-operation so far has been strongly driven by bottom-up action, but experience from previous disasters shows that this honeymoon phase could easily give way to disillusionment (see box 1), a process that will be accelerated by disruptive state and non-state actors.

### Box 1: Phases of Disaster

The field of disaster sociology, which studies how people feel and behave in the aftermath of major shocks, points to well-identified phases of how people think and feel in the wake of disasters.<sup>170</sup> Action is needed to sustain cohesion, agency, and optimism as exhaustion sets in and people, communities, and whole countries start to feel abandoned, resentful, and under impossible stress.



Strengthening the basis for co-operation requires a commitment to practical action, together with a willingness to tackle the psychological dimensions of this crisis. Ultimately the real battle will be won or lost in our minds and relationships, and in whether we respond to perceived threats by going into ‘fight-or-flight’ or ‘tend-and-befriend’ mode.<sup>171</sup>

With each of the four key drivers that will determine whether we shift from low to high resilience, there are practical steps we can take to accelerate Larger Us collective action.

### *Risk Sharing*

Coronavirus threatens everyone in the world, but the pandemic has hit different places at different times, creating tensions in the process. Inequality was already dangerously high, but the virus is creating new inequalities, for example around the ability to work from home, access to outside space, or access to food, medicines, and healthcare.<sup>172</sup> Its intergenerational dynamics could prove an especially powerful driver of polarisation in the future, with the Millennial/Generation Z ‘OK Boomer’ epithet foreshadowing significant increases in conflict between young and old.<sup>173</sup>

Conversely, though, equitable risk sharing can be promoted through coalitions that visibly promote solidarity between countries facing different levels of threat, through a relief effort that proactively targets groups that are most at risk, and by addressing the loss of opportunities for children and young people.

### *Longer Horizons*

During the first 100 days of the pandemic, firefighting naturally predominated in the risk response from both governments and civil society. Crisis can be self-reinforcing, however, and we may see a pattern emerging where “conflict – and the response to that conflict – dominate the attention of leaders and citizens.”<sup>174</sup> As decision makers face growing cognitive pressure, the current game of ‘whack-a-mole’ could turn into one of Tetris, where the capacity to respond to challenges of different shapes and sizes steadily shrinks.

Government also risk making short-term decisions that will have significant and poorly-understood long-term consequences – for example, in the way that they bail out an industry that is in trouble. They need analysis that increases their scope for making future decisions and which avoids ‘baking in’ the structural exclusion of vulnerable groups.<sup>175</sup>

### *Shared Awareness*

While COVID-19 is monopolising media attention and news cycles, it is unclear whether shared awareness about the pandemic is increasing.

Increasing shared awareness is less about the production of knowledge than actively building consensus about how knowledge can be used to manage risks effectively.

In the next phase of the pandemic, we need to think together to act together.<sup>176</sup> Like-minded governments and other actors should create platforms for building consensus on what works and create shared standards for the implementation of policies. Strategies to counter conspiracy theories must be carefully designed and should take account of the compelling evidence that ‘fact-checking’ approaches are usually ineffective and often counterproductive.<sup>177</sup>

### Shared Platforms

The COVID-19 pandemic has already spurred a wealth of innovation. Finance is beginning to flow to turn research into impact, with the Coronavirus Global Response pledging conference raising €7.4 billion.<sup>178</sup> Economic policies have been forceful and relatively well targeted towards people and their needs. An enormous grassroots mobilisation has emerged in local communities.

Shared platforms are needed to sustain international co-operation. These may be *informal* and organised to solve a problem, *semi-permanent* where networks work together over a prolonged period, or *architectural* and involving the creation of a new institution or mechanism. Finance is also needed for the unglamorous task of creating the ‘backbone’ or core functions that will allow highly diverse groups of actors to work together.

Shared platforms may be *informal* and organised to solve a problem, *semi-permanent* where networks work together over a prolonged period, or *architectural* and involving the creation of a new institution or mechanism.

## A Playbook for Collective Action on COVID-19

What would it look like to apply these principles for collective action?

### 1. Enforce rules proportionately

Lockdown restrictions have created a host of new rules and made many things scarce, from fresh air to a social life or even access to necessities such as food. Citizens are acutely sensitive to the nuances of these rules and the fallout from their imposition. Abuses by the police and security forces could trigger flashpoints that upend national cohesion or generate grievances that fester for a generation. As a result, governments need to be seen to ensure that rules are applied fairly, and that over-zealous enforcement is reined in.

The same point holds true at international level, where perceptions of whether or not other countries are ‘playing by the rules’ will have a powerful effect. Pressures are already building which challenge the rules on which international



order is based. Countries are competing for medical supplies, with trade restrictions forcing the prices of masks up by 20%.<sup>179</sup> Increased competition for food and other resources will deepen the scarcity dynamic, while growing disagreement over travel bans could also fuel nationalism.

To ease these pressures, the UN's Supply Chain Task Force is building an emergency global supply chain system through which it expects to supply 30% of global needs for essential equipment. The Director-General of the WHO has committed to establishing a high-level panel to advise on the distribution of a vaccine and other medical supplies.<sup>180</sup> These and similar platforms bodies can be used to promote risk sharing and to rebuild the commitment to equitable and rules-based distribution of scarce resources.

## 2. *Confront new inequalities*

When it comes to social inequality, the new front lines are between those who have food supplies or toilet roll, a white-collar job that can be done from home, or access to outside space – and those who don't. Ethnic minorities, women, young people, the lower-paid, and people in informal employment are all feeling a disproportionate share of the negative effects.<sup>181</sup> More subtly, people's experience of lockdowns varies widely. Those working in healthcare are profoundly shaken by what they have seen, while some who are far from the frontlines question the seriousness of the outbreak.

Stimulus packages address some of the impact of these inequalities but have not yet done enough to mitigate them. Sustained, people-centred policies will be needed if governments are not to revert to damaging patterns seen after the 2008 financial crisis, where bailouts were co-opted by elites and austerity punished the already disadvantaged.

Co-ordinated action is also needed to deter profiteers and promote responsible behaviour by businesses. Many firms are stepping up by innovating, sustaining supply chains, or keeping on staff. But others have been guilty of selfish or extractive behaviour. The global business community should urgently agree on a set of principles for responsible behaviour in this crisis and ask all firms, large and small, to publicly endorse them.

Multinational businesses that are reaping large profits during the pandemic, particularly the technology giants and 'Big Pharma', must end their rear-guard action against fair global taxation, or accept the inevitable alternative of a populist and progressive backlash.

### Principles for collective action

- Enforce rules proportionately
- Confront new inequalities
- Invest in foresight
- Tell a story of hope
- Defend the facts
- Create consensus around solutions
- Build innovative partnerships
- Give everyone a role

### 3. Invest in foresight

Governments and international actors will steadily lose public confidence if they continue to give the impression that they are three or four weeks behind the crisis.

Platforms are needed to promote foresight and to develop joint initiatives that will have an outsized impact in five, ten, or fifty years' time.<sup>182</sup> Given the pressures they face, governments may fail to develop these on their own, providing an opportunity for foundations and other far-sighted actors to incubate the ideas that will be needed if the world is to "build back better."<sup>183</sup>

Policymakers will be more effective if they embrace uncertainty. As we argued in Part 1, much remains unknown about the pandemic, the economic crisis, and the social and cultural changes that are underway. Experiments demonstrate that the public is more tolerant of uncertainty than is often believed.<sup>184</sup> But farsighted planning can *only* be credible if it is open about what is known and what is not known, and if it builds in rapid feedback loops that allow strategies to be refined as new evidence becomes available.

### 4. Tell a story of hope

Eighty years ago, when Winston Churchill gave his 'Finest Hour' speech following the French capitulation to Nazi Germany in June 1940, he was unflinching about the gravity of the threat the UK and all of Europe faced, but he told a story that reignited national belief in a better future.<sup>185</sup> Leaders must similarly rise to that challenge in today's pandemic, but in an age of social media storytellers, so must the rest of us.

Churchill also forbade recriminations – "if we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future." His advice should be taken. The time will come for commissions of inquiry and for learning lessons about what went right and wrong, but we cannot respond to a crisis of this magnitude if we spend too much time looking through the rear-view mirror.

Hope is easier to build if we take mental health seriously. Even for those of us who have not been infected by this coronavirus, the pandemic has burrowed deeply into our minds and hearts. In the months ahead, we will be acutely vulnerable to loneliness, anxiety, boredom and – increasingly – grief. A psychological relief operation is needed to airdrop assistance to people in managing their emotional and mental states. And as we stay apart physically, we will need to develop deeper forms of online interaction to nurture a sense of belonging.

## *5. Defend the facts*

Scientists have enough to contend with today without fake news, conspiracy theories, and hate mail making their jobs more difficult. A vaccine for the coronavirus is still a long way off, but the anti-vaxxer movement is already rallying to resist it.

Lecturing people will not help and could increase public scepticism. Instead, policymakers and scientists should replicate the success of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the scientific body that has taught the world so much about the climate threat. They should create a multinational and multilingual expert panel to provide briefings on the pandemic every week, including an update on the response, and answer crowd-sourced questions from the global public. By providing regular exposure to a small number of trusted faces, this panel will provide an 'anchor' for debate about COVID-19.

Broader action is needed to promote fact-based debate, at a time when media organisations are experiencing a collapse in revenue. Many are struggling to survive, especially in developing countries. Foundations should invest to ensure that each country maintains a minimum level of independent media. Large technology platforms could help strengthen media organisations' online presence and mechanisms for raising revenue online.

Targeted action is needed to counter forces that divide us. Social media algorithms are having a field day frightening and outraging people, with sections of the media following suit as they seek to protect shrinking profits. Activists, too, can thoughtlessly polarise as they battle for their issues and 'asks' – and for funds. Collectively, we need to invest in solutions journalism, block trolls and grifters, and spread the awareness that anything we click on, we amplify.

## *6. Create consensus around solutions*

Polarisation is fed by hopelessness, while collective action is encouraged by the belief that problems can effectively be solved. We have seen the power of concepts such as 'flattening the curve' to influence both policy and public opinion – and to influence the acceptance of a broadly common approach across multiple countries to managing the first stage of the pandemic.

Efforts are now needed to build consensus on common standards for a 'test, trace, and isolate' second phase. As well as grounding policies in evidence, adherence to collective standards will shield government from criticisms that they have acted too early or too late, while building public confidence that there is a plan. A debate is urgently needed

about the overall goal of the next phase of the response. Are countries committed to eradicating infections or keeping them at very low levels? Or do they accept the disease is now endemic and are pursuing the more modest goal of avoiding spikes that overwhelm health systems?

Consensus should also be built in other areas, such as how to scale up cash transfers and job guarantees as part of a 'disaster relief' bailout for vulnerable households,<sup>186</sup> develop common standards for managing sovereign debt risk,<sup>187</sup> or respond to emerging challenges such as the spike in domestic violence.<sup>188</sup> Over time, the aim should be to increase shared awareness within and between sectors.

## **7. Build innovative partnerships**

The pandemic has begun to encourage new types of networked co-operation at a global level, including regular virtual meetings of Health Ministers, international research programmes to develop antiviral treatments and vaccines, and collaborations between international organisations and NGOs to develop responses to COVID-19 in settings experiencing humanitarian crises.<sup>189</sup>

To tackle the short and long-term impacts of the crisis in a world where too many governments are determined to plough their own furrow, more of these partnerships will be needed. Coalitions of the willing can establish new mechanisms or instigate reforms for combating this and future pandemics and for working together to cushion the economic fallout.<sup>190</sup> We are beginning to see groups come together who have had a 'good crisis' so far, with countries such as New Zealand, Australia, and South Korea working together.<sup>191</sup>

Other sources of leadership are important, such as The Elders, the special envoys appointed by the African Union,<sup>192</sup> or the group of Presidents and Prime Ministers that have called for a "people's vaccine."<sup>193</sup> The Presidents of Costa Rica and Chile are building a high-ambition coalition of like-minded heads of government to "create a pool of rights to tests, medicines and vaccines, with free access or licensing on reasonable and affordable terms for all countries."<sup>194</sup>

At the same time, disruptive partners should be sidelined. A group of experts on polarisation should be formed to synthesise knowledge and trends, issue guidance for countering polarisation and promoting collective action, and provide advice for governments, media, and civil society. For some countries where the government is obstructive, it may be helpful to promote the visibility of mayors and other subnational leaders, and business organisations that recognise the need for global action.

## 8. Give everyone a role

Never in recent history have governments put so much collective energy into telling people what not to do, but bossiness alone will not be enough to sustain the public resolve necessary for an effective response. People are desperate to help. When the UK government recently asked for health volunteers, more than 750,000 people signed up immediately, and that became a million within days.<sup>195</sup> Governments need to recognise, respect, and above all act on people's need to be involved as part of the solution.

Nurturing the grassroots will also pay short and long-term dividends. 'COVID mutual aid' associations are springing up all over the world, and they will inevitably take on additional roles as the crisis broadens. But self-organised efforts will only sustain themselves for so long. Governments, civil society networks, and foundations must figure out how to support, empower, and work with them. Above all, new mechanisms are needed to efficiently get small amounts of funding to very large numbers of groups – and to do this visibly so communities know that help is reaching them from outside.

International grassroots efforts should also be supported. Networks of grassroots justice defenders share knowledge across borders that helps people in marginalised communities to access justice.<sup>196</sup> Diaspora communities have used social media platforms to share knowledge of virus prevention and combated misinformation with those back home.<sup>197</sup> Policymakers should tap into these international collaborations to learn about responses and share information. To assist such groups with fundraising, they should work together to temporarily remove the barriers to cheap money transfers.

These eight principles will be relevant at all levels, from local to global, but the latter is *especially* important – partly because action at this level has fallen so far short of what is needed, and partly because COVID-19 is a global problem, which respects no borders and demands that governments act in concert if they want to defeat the virus rather than each other. In the next part of the paper, we make concrete recommendations for the forms of international action that are most needed.

## Part 3

# Take it Global

Coronavirus has pulled both globalisation and global governance into their deepest crisis for decades. Even before the crisis, the world's capacity to act collectively was badly weakened. As we explored in part 2, this leads to a knife edge between polarisation on the one hand and collective action on the other.

At a global level, a Larger Us strategy could lead to a breakthrough scenario in which COVID-19 increases the foundations for international co-operation, improving our capacity to deal with current emergencies and other shared challenges like climate change. On the other hand, there is the risk of countries pursuing Them and Us strategies that reduce the capacity for international action at a time when it is needed most, and increase the risk of a catastrophic breakdown scenario just when we can least afford it.

There are already alarming early signals of a slide towards the latter outcome. So how do actors who understand the need for a Larger Us approach – whether in governments and multilateral agencies, or in civil society, the media, business, and academia – take back the initiative?

Given the scale of the crisis, it will be impossible to accomplish everything we want to at a global level. Instead, we need to:

- ◇ **Form 'minimum viable alliances'.<sup>†</sup>** Rather than trying to align all countries behind a unified strategy, we need action platforms that start with a core group that can begin to manage a risk or solve a problem – and then expand participation as momentum builds.
- ◇ **Look beyond the usual suspects.** As we have already seen, leadership is a scarce resource during our current crisis. Alliances will be most effective when they draw from developed countries that have traditionally been committed to international co-operation, but provide a platform for political leaders from all regions and income groups while offering a prominent role to non-government leaders.
- ◇ **Invest in a new set of skills.** As we shoot the rapids, we will need a different kind of diplomat, decision maker, campaigner, or change agent. There will be a premium on entrepreneurial and outward-looking diplomats, who excel at building partnerships and alliances, have deep

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<sup>†</sup> Drawn from the concept of a minimum viable product – an agile strategy common within the technology industry which aims to launch a new project or platform as quickly as possible and then to learn quickly from how it is used by early adopters.

skills in psychology, narratives, and communication, and understand how people and societies behave under stress.

Given the complexity of this crisis, agile and adaptable strategies are needed, but an action plan for international co-operation should have four main dimensions.

First, the international system needs to firefight better, getting the emergency response right to build hope that the most urgent problems can be overcome. Second, it needs to make societies and people feel more secure, not only to defuse risks of violence and conflict, but to create the psychological conditions needed to support collective action. Third, the critical global infrastructure must be protected, identifying the forms of global co-operation that we absolutely cannot afford to lose, and then defending them like our lives depend on it (they do). And finally, we need a new deal for a new generation, protecting the future of children and young people through education, jobs, and climate protection.

## 1. Firefight better

If policymakers want to maintain public trust and confidence, they must show they can work collectively to solve problems faster than new ones arise.

### *Spread the leadership burden*

When people call for leadership from international system, the spotlight shines upon the Secretary-General, and the heads of the IMF, World Bank, and the UN funds, programmes, and specialised agencies. But they can only be effective with member state support and this has been slow to arrive during the current pandemic.

Given a dysfunctional Security Council, hostility from the United States' President, and a divided General Assembly, an informal coalition must speak with one voice. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's proposal for an 'M7' is welcome but focuses too much on traditional major powers.<sup>198</sup> Non-Western G20 countries and other regional powers have an important role to play. As the SIDS – the Small Island Developing States – have shown on climate change, smaller countries can be influential if they frame their own national needs within the broader collective challenge.

Member states should help the Secretary-General to stay focused on a small number of areas where he can have most impact, including ensuring universal access to testing, treatments, and a vaccine, continuing his push for a global ceasefire, and keeping trade routes open. He should appoint a Special Envoy on COVID-19 with a mandate to work on all three layers of the crisis (public health, economic, political/cultural), across the international system, and between governments, business, and civil society.

## *Turbocharge the health response*

Governments need to rally to defend the World Health Organisation from attack. A good starting point would be to pass a World Health Assembly resolution committing to first equitable and then universal access to protective equipment, testing, treatment, and vaccines, as well as finally getting serious about universal health coverage.

At the same time, they should also lift pressure on WHO by creating a broader leadership coalition for the public health emergency that brings together the heads of WHO, UNAIDS, and the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI). GAVI has an obvious role to play in driving the global distribution of a vaccine while keeping basic immunisation systems alive. Its board chair, the former Nigerian finance minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has been appointed Special Envoy for the global accelerator that WHO and partners have launched to promote equitable access to COVID-19 technologies.<sup>199</sup>

But UNAIDS – under Winnie Byanyima, the former head of Oxfam – also has an important role to play, if the social and community determinants of the virus are not to be neglected. Governments should ask UNAIDS to extend its current missions on a temporary basis – initially for two years – and task it with focusing on testing, behaviour change, care in communities, and confronting stigma and misinformation.

## *Move towards a people-centred approach*

Policymakers need to anticipate how the pandemic will evolve and be ready to shift from a high-cost, hospital-driven model to a more community-focused one.<sup>200</sup>

Many more people are dying than in official statistics, with excess mortality 60% above reported deaths across 14 countries.<sup>201</sup> Most of these people are dying outside hospitals, either in care homes or other residential facilities, or in their own homes. This trend will intensify as the pandemic moves to the South, where few health systems have the capacity to provide intensive care at scale.

The next phase of the pandemic will require a focus on care and prevention in communities, residential institutions, and homes, with investment in the development and testing of lower-cost and more scalable treatments. Global expertise and funding will need to train and protect community workers, from health and non-health sectors, who will increasingly find themselves on the frontline of this pandemic. Both Ebola and HIV/AIDS provide models for how this can be done.

A people-centred approach will build the foundations for a global vaccination campaign, with planning needed now for universal and equitable registration, supply, and roll out.<sup>202</sup> It

### **Dimensions for international co-operation**

1. Firefight better
2. Make people feel secure
3. Protect critical global infrastructure
4. Offer a new deal to a new generation



will also increase resilience for the next pandemic, building the public health structures and habits that are needed for widespread preparedness.

## 2. Make people feel secure

Insecurity – and perceptions of insecurity – are increasing, making it harder to tackle the pandemic and undermining the psychological, social, and political conditions that support collective action.

### *Reduce conflict risk*

The post-Cold War era saw a steep decline in conflict between states and reduced geopolitical tensions. The international system moved from a focus on hard security to a concern about conflict within states, and between states and non-state actors.<sup>203</sup> As geopolitical tensions rise, the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to mark the end of this period, with disastrous impact on international capacity to solve immediate and longer-term problems.

Members of the Security Council – both permanent and elected<sup>‡</sup> – need to show the Council can help defuse tensions both between major powers and with others like Iran and the DPRK, while continuing to address civil wars and threats from non-state actors. This is time to increase investment in conflict prevention, based on joint surveillance of patterns of insecurity and emerging grievances.

They also need to be ready to support governments that are unable to deliver core functions, for instance through paying the wages of frontline public servants (as happened in the Central African Republic).

### *Tackle insecurity in communities and homes*

With communities under pressure, action is needed to increase human security.

A good place to start would be to create a network of mayors to address insecurity in cities, modelled on the C40 climate coalition, with the aim of targeting resources at neighbourhoods that bear the highest risks from the pandemic *and* from violence.

Countries should also collectively tackle violence at home, with a strong focus on campaigning, social norms, and leadership roles for female and child survivors of violence. The UN Secretary-General has issued a call to action to protect women and children during the pandemic.<sup>204</sup> Internationally

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<sup>‡</sup> Belgium, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Germany, Indonesia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, Viet Nam.

agreed strategies and partnerships such as the Spotlight Initiative and the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children provide a 'shovel ready' route for increased investment and action.

Finally, investment is needed to tackle the trauma caused by the pandemic, through a 'psychological airdrop' to provide mental and psychosocial support to all those who need it during and after the pandemic, with leadership from former health ministers and leaders. New models for small group and helpline support will be needed to reach people at scale and at an adequate cost.

### *Stop people going hungry and provide access to universal healthcare and safety nets*

With 130 million more people likely to be at risk of starvation by the end of the year, we need to protect food production – especially by smaller farmers, and ensure food gets to people who need it.<sup>205</sup> More humanitarian assistance, both food and cash, is one obvious starting point. Cash transfers to help farmers in low income countries is another.

At the same time, leaders need to work collectively to help people manage the risks they face. They should commit to using stimulus packages to provide publicly funded healthcare for all who need it and to invest in a global social protection floor to protect the most vulnerable in all countries.

This will increase economic security, while reducing the proportion of bailout funds that are co-opted by elites and large corporations. It will also decrease the risk of a new refugee crisis in a few months' time.

## **3. Protect critical global infrastructure**

A third priority is to protect global critical infrastructure: the institutions and systems that we cannot afford to lose as we navigate the long crisis of COVID-19.

### *Keep global food supply chains open*

While part of the 2008 global food price crisis was about surging demand for food crops coupled with supply side challenges such as extreme weather, the crisis was made much worse by perturbations in the international food trade system – above all, the food export bans imposed by over 30 countries at the height of the crisis.

It rapidly became clear that the world had no mechanism for dealing with a wave of tit-for-tat measures, with the UN Secretary-General calling national leaders to beg them to remove restrictions.

This time around, leaders should start planning immediately for what it will take to reduce damage to supply chains caused by changing patterns of supply and demand, labour shortages, and lockdowns. They must also ensure these risks are not further exacerbated by protectionism or a trade war.

A first step would be to commission multilateral agencies like the UN, World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organisation, and World Food Programme to assemble a global plan, as they did in 2008.

### *Stabilise global energy markets*

As economic activity has collapsed, so has demand for oil and hence the oil price – which has, in the US, fallen below zero at points as storage capacity reaches its limits.

While the long term need for the world to move decisively away from oil in order to hit climate goals is obvious, that does not eliminate the huge risks involved in unmanaged volatility – from potential supply interruptions arising from mass bankruptcies in the sector, to deep economic hardship in oil producing countries (which are often both poor and fragile).

Here as well, leaders should urgently task international bodies – including the International Energy Agency – to come up with a blueprint for a shared global response to stabilise energy markets, ensuring continuity of supply, and address economic, political, and security risks facing major oil exporters.

### *Commit to maintaining trade*

The broader international trade system must also be protected.

For better or worse, the world has collectively come to depend on globalised, just-in-time supply chains for everything from food to high tech manufactures – with billions of us reliant on them both to meet our everyday needs, and for our jobs and incomes.

In the long term, a debate will no doubt emerge about whether such supply chains are a source of shared prosperity, collective vulnerability, or both. But for now, in the thick of the crisis, the priority must be to defend the supply chains we all rely on. Countries should respond to the call from the WTO and IMF to commit to refrain from imposing import, export, or investment restrictions as they did during the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>206</sup>

### *Other systemic risks*

More broadly, leaders need increased capacity to scan for other systemic risks and potential cascading failures and ‘consequences of consequences’ – for instance in areas like financial risk or the global communication networks that the world already relied on before COVID-19, and that are now the only thing keeping us connected to each other.

In a similar vein, given the direct assaults on multilateral organisations being made by some countries (most notably the United States and Russia), other leaders should also work together to identify the institutional infrastructure that the world relies on to deal with wider systemic risks like interstate conflict, state fragility, or refugee crises – and move with alacrity to rally around them when needed.

## 4. Offer a new deal to a new generation

Fourth and finally, the world needs to protect the futures of young people – and of a generation that has borne the brunt of austerity programmes, student debt, high housing costs, job insecurity, and the failure to act to prevent increasingly dangerous patterns of climate change.

### *Quality education*

With lockdowns in place all over the world, almost 90% of the world's students have been affected by school closures, with the potential for disruption to continue for months or even years.<sup>207</sup>

Leaders should make a joint commitment to ensuring that education systems received the funding they need to make sure all children – in particular, the most vulnerable – are able to make up for the missed education. They should invest in open-source platforms for providing no-tech and low-tech support for home learning and prioritise internet connectivity in areas that lack it.

Children and young people should also be offered a guarantee that national and international funding for education will not be allowed to fall below pre-crisis levels.

### *Jobs guarantee*

Leaders should protect incomes and livelihoods – where young people, who are most likely to be in low paid or informal work, are particularly affected.

As many developed countries roll out bailout packages of unprecedented scale, leaders need to get moving with a global public works programme to increase youth employability and reduce youth unemployment – for instance employing young people to deliver services to the sick or the locked-down during the pandemic.

New Deal projects to build or upgrade critical national infrastructure will provide longer term employment to large numbers of the young. A Jobs Guarantee programme could promise young people a minimum period of employment in the five years after they leave their school or college.

## *Climate change*

Finally, this is the moment for leaders to get serious about a rapid transition to a low carbon economy.

Although the 2015 Paris Agreement was a breakthrough, global emissions have risen since then, leaving big questions about whether the authority generation has any intention of implementing its carbon promises.

Although COVID-19 has already forced the postponement of the crucial 2020 UN climate summit, due to be held in the UK, this could yet prove to be a huge positive – for the same countries that will co-host next year’s rescheduled summit, the UK and Italy, are also 2021’s chairs of the G7 and G20.

This highly unusual alignment across different global leadership forums provides an extraordinary opportunity that leaders cannot afford to waste. Leaders should use these platforms to declare 2019 the year of peak global emissions and set out recovery plans that are heavily skewed towards low carbon technologies and pathways.

## Conclusion

# Towards global risk management

In the past, systemic crises have led to major moments of multilateral innovation. For this crisis, it is too early to be sure what new direction is needed, but it is time to start addressing the question.

We have proposed concrete proposals for tackling polarisation and strengthening the basis for collective action, and the main dimensions of an action plan for international co-operation to confront the health, economic, political, and security dimensions of the crisis.

This provides the basis of a 'risk doctrine' for building resilience during the long crisis of globalisation. A guiding principle is that form should follow function. International co-operation should never be an end in itself. But in a fast-moving emergency, states will inevitably go it alone if there are not immediate, tangible, and visible benefits to working collectively.

We also need to be clear about *who* needs to be involved. There are 'moonshot' challenges in which one actor can solve a problem for everyone, others where coalitions of the willing can take on the burden, and a third group where *all* governments need to row together. In many cases, the list of actors needed will extend far beyond states and into new networked models that bring together public and private actors.

Above all, we need a reappraisal of globalisation in light of the pandemic and the pandemic response. What *now* should be managed at global, national, and or local levels – whether on mobility, trade, finance, regulation, or pandemic preparedness? In each of these areas, has globalisation gone too far, too fast? Or, conversely, is it an area in which it is more, not less, globalisation that we really need?

A wholesale retreat into nationalism, or even worse localism, is not possible. But at the same time, we are building complex global systems whose workings we only dimly understand. Any process of global governance reform will need to be serious about both risk and subsidiarity. What function is best discharged at what level? And which checks and balances are needed to ensure its health and resilience?

At all levels, we face choices between a Them and Us or a Larger Us response. And it is the aggregate of these choices that will ultimately determine where this is a breakdown or breakthrough moment.

We need a reappraisal of globalisation in light of the pandemic and the pandemic response. Where has globalisation gone too far, too fast? Or, where do we need more, not less, globalisation?

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The COVID-19 pandemic marks a turning point in the 21st century. The world faces a public health emergency, a financial crisis, and growing polarisation and insecurity. Millions of lives, billions of people's futures, and trillions of dollars depend on whether we opt for a Larger Us or Them and Us response to each of these challenges. We face one of two futures: a breakdown, where infections and deaths are very high, economic impacts are savage, and we turn on each other just when we most need to combine our efforts; or a breakthrough, where the toll of the pandemic is still heavy, but our capacity for collective action grows.

**LONG CRISIS**  
NETWORK

