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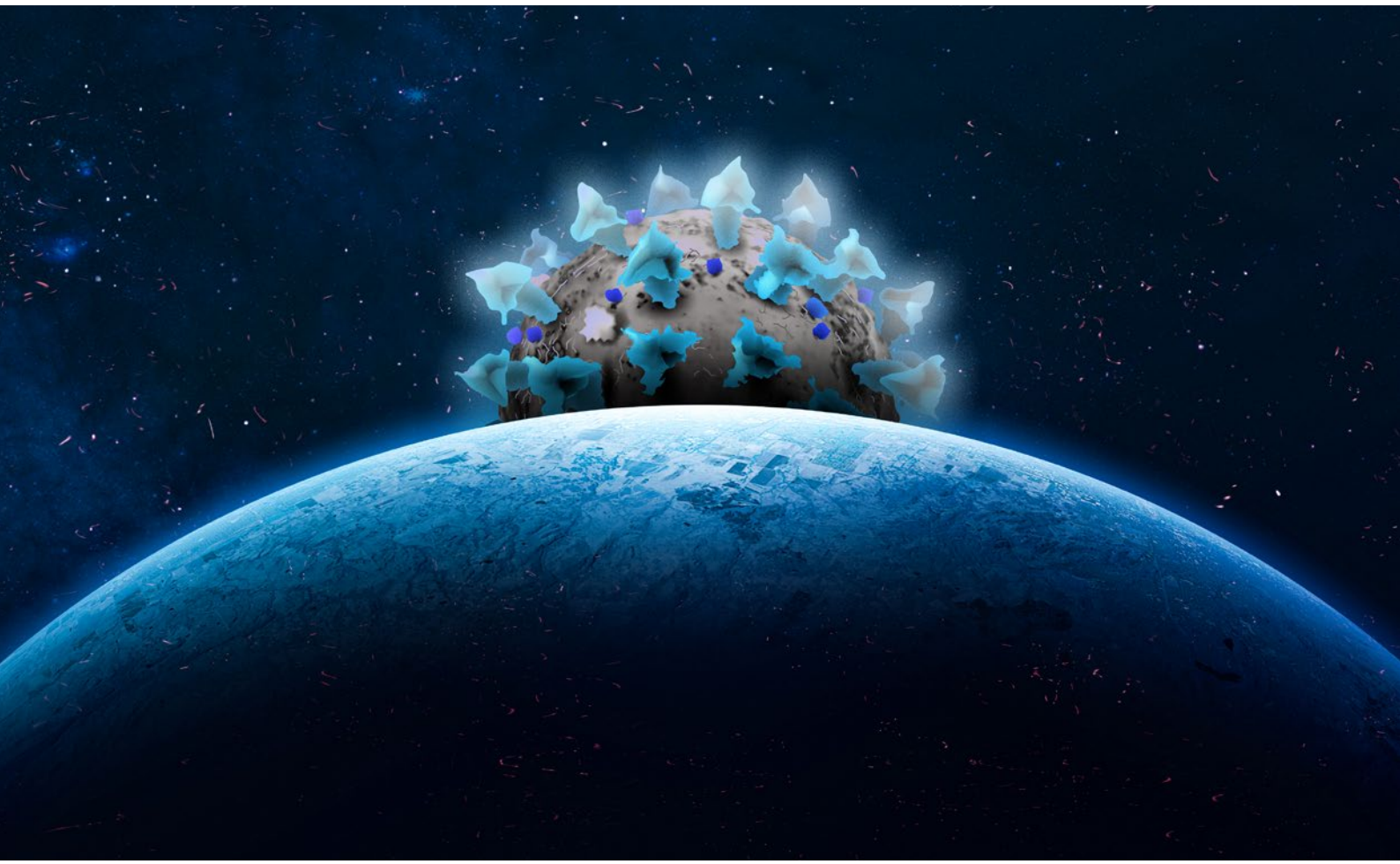
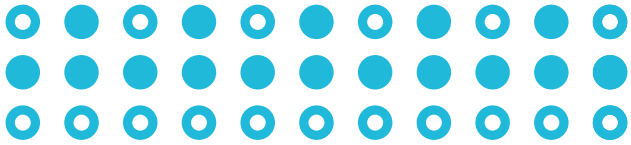


A CASE FOR TRANSFORMATION? THE LONGER-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Outcome Paper



1 INTRODUCTION

2020 was a year unlike any other. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered the ***most severe global crisis since World War II***, upending the lives and livelihoods of tens of millions of people.[1] The virus exposed and exacerbated long-standing fragility, vulnerability, and inequality. It tested the limits of communal solidarity and discipline, national preparedness and response capacities, and international cooperation. Countries and communities were thrust into a recession of historic proportions, which threatens to undermine economic growth, social cohesion and political stability. This downturn is hindering progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), potentially stifling aid budgets, and expanding national and personal debt, poverty and the need for basic services and commodities.[2] The pandemic's profound health and economic effects are compounded by the equally colossal challenges of climate change and inequality, increasing geopolitical tensions, political upheaval, violent conflict, and a growing urgency to address social and racial injustices.

The pandemic and intersecting challenges have affected ***every sector, system and organization***. They have also highlighted the opportunity and the need for greater change and transformation. Member States, regional and international organizations, the private sector, communities and civil society have had to adapt. The humanitarian sector has adjusted its priorities, programmes, ways of working, and organizational design. As with previous crises, the pandemic is proving to be less of a 'big reset' than a 'big exposer': uncovering structural vulnerabilities and systemic dysfunctionalities in institutions and governance; accelerating trends and initiatives; and driving home the true extent and meaning of interconnectedness and global cooperation. Can the lessons learned from COVID-19 be mainstreamed into organizational design and day-to-day operations? How can we build response coalitions while strengthening local leadership and capacity? What will it take to prepare for the next global crisis? And how can we realize the 'digital promise' for humanitarian action?

Over ***1,200 participants*** from more than ***80 countries*** debated these and other questions at the ***9th Global Humanitarian Policy Forum*** (GHPF). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Foundation (UNF) virtually convened the forum on 9 and 10 December 2020 under the theme, *'A Case for Transformation? The Longer-term Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic'*. Representatives from humanitarian and development organizations, governments, the private sector, civil society and academia discussed the political, socio-economic, and security implications of the pandemic and how they might transform humanitarian action.[3]

The GHPF's key ***conclusions*** included the following:

- ***Prepare for the unknown and re-prioritize preparedness***. The pandemic exposed collective and systemic failures in preparedness for events of such magnitude and uncertainty. Sustained efforts to scale up preparedness and anticipatory action must go hand-in-hand with building resilience of the most affected communities. These efforts should include political and financial investments; strategic and long-term collaboration and partnerships

across sectors; and transparent information flows and inclusive communication with communities. Preparedness for mega-disasters and pandemics must be considered matters of strategic priority and security, requiring dedicated capacities and integrated governance structures.

- ***Invest in frontline leadership and local solutions for global problems***. The crisis has underscored the pivotal role of community engagement and leadership in managing the pandemic's intersecting impacts. It is time to make genuine progress on longstanding localization commitments and reframe humanitarian partnerships around a clear vision of responsibilities, envisaged outcomes and comparative advantages.

- ***Diversity, equity and inclusion matter, everywhere***. They are essential to leadership and expertise, partnerships between organizations, and the design of and investment in programmes and priorities. Leading with equity means applying an equity lens to all programming, funding, and policymaking, taking a rights-based approach to humanitarian action, and linking response to long-term programmes for vulnerable groups. It also means combatting structural racism, exclusion, inequality and discrimination, including within the humanitarian system.

- ***Realize the 'digital promise' but recognize the value of proximity***. Digital technologies create numerous opportunities to act earlier, faster and more effectively.[4] But these technologies must be employed responsibly, sustainably and inclusively and, above all, in a way that protects human life and dignity. Strengthening connectivity, access to basic technology and digital literacy is an essential focus for programmes and an opportunity for partnerships. At the same time, direct interaction is indispensable for humanitarians to work in a principled, sustained and effective manner.

- ***Build coalitions for success to transcend siloed approaches***. In an interconnected world, solutions must be interconnected across geographies, sectors and disciplines. Collaboration at and among all levels of government, aid organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia is an indispensable building block of modern crisis management, and it must be deliberate and by design. Building coalitions of diverse stakeholders requires far-sighted efforts ahead of a crisis, as well as agility, solidarity and coordination after it strikes. Protocols and platforms should be in place that can be activated quickly.

In the following sections, this paper highlights the key challenges exposed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (**Section 2**) and discusses their implications for humanitarian action (**Section 3**). It concludes with recommended priorities for action for 2021 and beyond (**Section 4**).

2 A GLOBAL MEGA-CRISIS AND ITS COMPOUNDING CHALLENGES

Millions of people felt the direct health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while its secondary shocks – including severe indirect health effects and a massive socio-economic downturn – turned the pandemic into a ***global mega-crisis of historic proportions***. These health and economic shocks compounded the effects of pre-existing vulnerabilities, from climate change and structural inequality and injustice, to conflict, violence and political upheaval. Obstacles to collective action accompanied these challenges in a tense geopolitical environment.

Global Public Health Crisis

The pandemic has proven ***a threat to health everywhere***. As of 1 March 2021, there were 114,140,104 cases and 2,535,520 deaths recorded worldwide.[5] From the earliest days of the pandemic, COVID-19 overwhelmed health services even in high income countries, leading to overcrowded hospitals, improvised cemeteries, exhausted medical personnel, and insufficient resources, equipment and supplies.[6] Hospitals and healthcare facilities lacked personal protective equipment as prices surged, production capacities were stretched, and supply chains disrupted.[7] At the end of March 2020, the world needed ten times as many ventilators as were available.[8] One year later, the availability of effective vaccines is both the greatest success story and biggest moral challenge of the pandemic. Its equitable roll-out and distribution are hindered by insufficient supplies, logistics challenges, geopolitical and economic competition and poor digital infrastructures.[9] Wealthy countries race to secure vaccines while protecting their intellectual property rights.[10] Where the vaccine is available, a lack of trust in national health systems and authorities prevent many eligible candidates from obtaining it. Equitable vaccine distribution is also an enormous test for the humanitarian sector with respect to collaboration with the scientific community, the private sector, governments and community leaders.

The stress on public health systems and medical supply chains, coupled with travel restrictions and lockdowns, dramatically impacted ***other health treatments and services***, threatening decades of progress, particularly in lower- and middle-income countries.[11] Reductions in mortality rates for tuberculosis and AIDS are estimated to be set back by 10 years, and by 20 years for malaria.[12] Progress in eradicating poliovirus and reducing measles was severely threatened as essential immunization services and campaigns were disrupted worldwide.[13] The indirect mortality rate from COVID-19 was far greater than the number of deaths directly caused by the disease, as countries prioritized COVID-19 response over other health threats, diseases, and preventive and elective care.[14] And as the demand for mental health services surged, the pandemic disrupted or halted such services in 93 per cent of countries.[15]

This ***shared vulnerability and deficiency in response*** to highly infectious diseases has underscored the critical importance of investing in well-prepared and equipped public health systems and workers, as well as in interdisciplinary and international collaboration around early warning and research.

Socio-Economic Downturn

The fight against COVID-19 has come at ***enormous economic cost***. It has led to the worst recession

since the Great Depression, with the broadest collapse in per capita income since 1870.[16] Remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries are expected to drop by approximately 20 per cent compared to 2019, placing some 33 million people at risk of hunger.[17] About 1.6 billion informal workers have lost 60 per cent of their incomes, even as 55 per cent of the world's population lack any form of social security coverage.[18] Global foreign direct investment fell by 49 per cent in the first half of 2020 compared to 2019,[19] and official development assistance could decline between US $11 and 14 billion.[20] More than 270 million people faced acute food insecurity in late-2020, an 82 per cent increase from pre-COVID estimates.[21] Extreme poverty is expected to rise for the first time in over twenty years.[22] And at the height of lockdowns, nearly 1.5 billion students were affected by school closures,[23] with 214 million remaining out of school in January 2021[24] and international aid for education likely to decline by up to 12 per cent from 2018 to 2022.[25]

The global economy is expected to rebound from its projected -3.5 per cent contraction in 2020, growing by 5.5 per cent in 2021 and another 4.2 per cent in 2022.[26] Yet, ***the road to recovery will be long, uneven and difficult***. Some economies will bounce back faster than others. Recovery will vary greatly within countries, disproportionately disadvantaging those already vulnerable to the inequities underlined by the pandemic, chiefly among them economic inequality and social and racial injustice. The pace, extent and durability of economic recovery will depend on access to vaccines and medical interventions, effective government policies and robust fiscal stimulus packages, and greener and more participatory growth. The very interconnectedness that stimulated growth over past decades has become an acute vulnerability as lockdowns, disruptions in manufacturing and the departure of foreign direct investment have affected consumer spending and production.

Enhanced multilateral ***cooperation*** and support from regional partners will be necessary to offset the worst effects of an uneven economic recovery, particularly in low-income countries. Vaccine access and distribution, debt relief and restructuring, tax matters, and adequate access to international liquidity are priority areas in this respect. Such cooperation is not only an act of global solidarity, but of strategic interest, bolstering social, economic and political stability, minimizing dependencies, and alleviating the pandemic's effects on the world's poor.

Compounding Effects of Pre-existing Vulnerabilities

People caught in humanitarian crises were already among the world's most vulnerable before COVID-19 hit, and the pandemic has ***exacerbated their vulnerabilities*** to inequality, climate change and conflict. These overlapping challenges have a cascading effect on affected communities, with little to no time between shocks to recover and recharge coping mechanisms.

i. Inequality

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the ***structural inequalities*** and disparities that have shaped needs and suffering across the globe. Long-ignored risks arising from gaps in social protection, health systems, and access to essential services were amplified by the pandemic.[27] Even before the pandemic, countries home to more than two thirds (71 per cent) of the world population witnessed growing inequality.[28]

Inequalities widened as vulnerable and marginalized groups ***suffered disproportionately from the pandemic's health crisis***. Travel restrictions and lockdowns exacerbated women's unequal access to quality health care.[29] Almost seven million additional children under the age of five were estimated to suffer from wasting during the first year of the

pandemic.[30] Protracted displacement combined with deteriorating health conditions led to widespread despair among refugee populations and Internally Displaced Persons.[31] Racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ people, and indigenous persons suffered disproportionately from discrimination and unequal health care access and utilization.[32] People with disabilities were directly impacted by health care deficiencies and potentially at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or suffering complications related to social distancing measures.[33] African-Americans in the United States were twice as likely, and Afro-descendants in Brazil 40 per cent more likely, to die of COVID-19 than White people, and across the board, the likelihood of dying from COVID-19 was significantly higher for the poor.[34] The death of George Floyd and global #BlackLivesMatter protests reinvigorated scrutiny of racism, systemic inequality and power imbalances within the humanitarian system.[35]

Vulnerable and marginalized groups also ***bore the brunt of the pandemic's socio-economic impacts***. Racial and ethnic minorities were hardest hit by wage and job losses.[36] Women and girls were at heightened risk of secondary impacts, including loss of earnings and increased exposure to gender-based violence.[37] Widespread loss of livelihoods and increased poverty among refugee populations was expected as access to the labour market, social safety nets, and humanitarian aid deteriorated.[38] More than a decade of progress in reducing child poverty and deprivation was expected to be reversed, with around 24 million children projected to drop out of school and children less likely to return the longer they are out of school in humanitarian settings.[39] More than 85 poor countries are not expected to have widespread access to COVID-19 vaccines before 2023.[40]

Unequal access to technology created gaping disparities in people's ability to pursue education and livelihood opportunities. A UNICEF study found that at least 31 per cent of schoolchildren could not be reached by remote (internet, TV or radio-based) learning programmes, primarily due to lack of equipment or remote learning policies.[41] More than 70 per cent of those students lived in rural areas, and over 75 per cent came from the poorest 40 per cent of households. Only 47 per cent of low-income countries used internet-based instruction, compared to 95 per cent of upper-middle-income countries. Further, millions of small retailers struggled to meet the sudden digital demand due to lack of access to technology and the internet, with severe economic recovery implications, particularly in Latin America, South East Asia and Africa.[42] United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres stressed, "the digital divide is now a matter of life and death for people who are unable to access essential health-care information. It is threatening to become the new face of inequality, reinforcing the social and economic disadvantages suffered by women and girls, people with disabilities and minorities of all kinds."[43]

ii. Climate Change

As the pandemic captured the world's attention, the ***humanitarian impacts of the climate crisis*** raged on. Displacement associated with disasters and the impacts of climate change accelerated at a massive pace, with over 9.8 million new displacements recorded in the first half of 2020 alone.[44] This figure is expected to rise as the climate crisis increases the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, including heatwaves, droughts, flooding, winter storms, hurricanes, and wildfires. South East Asia has been hit particularly hard, as extreme weather events such as floods and typhoons devastated parts of Vietnam, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Thailand.[45] All of these disasters are happening in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, making humanitarian operations more complex than ever, and exacerbating acute vulnerabilities of marginalized groups.

Climate change ***disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable***. Children, who are nearly half of those affected by disasters, have been at higher risk of encountering violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation in disaster settings, including disasters driven by climate change.[46] Women and girls are often severely limited by gendered systems, laws, structures, and social expectations. They are underrepresented in climate change-related decision-making processes, despite being at particular risk from the socio-economic and health impacts of climate change.[47] People in poverty, indigenous people and small-scale landholders are vulnerable due to dependence on agriculture, fishing and other ecosystem-related income.[48] Agriculture, a vital sector in the poorest countries, is affected by climatic changes that threaten export earnings, livelihoods, sources of income and food security.[49] Climate change and extreme weather events are key drivers of the recent rise in global hunger and food insecurity.[50]

The ***growing frequency and intensity*** of extreme weather events mirrors the growing protracted nature of humanitarian crises. Between 2000 and 2019, 3.9 billion people were affected by 6,681 climate-related disasters, an increase of 83 per cent from the period between 1980 and 1999.[51] In 2020, eight of the ten countries most susceptible to the effects of climate change[52] had an inter-agency humanitarian appeal.[53] All eight of these countries have had consecutive appeals for the past ten years.[54]

iii. Conflict and Protection Risks

The pandemic ***did not lead to a "lockdown of violence"***.[55] While direct causal links between COVID-19 and violent conflicts remain to be shown, indirect effects were readily apparent. Fragile states were even less able to meet their populations' basic needs, in some instances ceding the space to non-state violent actors; and competing powers continued to exploit fragile situations for their geopolitical agendas, even as fewer international resources were available for conflict resolution, increasing the risk of new conflicts while complicating existing ones.[56] Despite support for the UN Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire,[57] many conflicts continued and human suffering intensified as a result of the pandemic's health and economic impacts.[58] Further conflict and violence may result from the pandemic as countries face civil unrest and economic devastation, political destabilization, and increases in crime, anti-refugee sentiment and suspicion of humanitarian workers.[59]

Other protection ***risks*** continue, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. ***Urban areas*** have become the pandemic's epicentre, with an estimated 95 per cent of all reported COVID-19 cases.[60] ***Displaced populations***, particularly in cities, have suffered increased protection risks posed by overcrowded and substandard living conditions and inadequate access to water, sanitation and healthcare. Movement constraints have hindered voluntary returns or escape from insecurity, and asylum procedures have been impeded in some countries.[61] ***Humanitarian access*** has been constrained by measures to contain COVID-19, including global movement restrictions that cause delays, higher costs and the partial suspension of humanitarian activities.[62] Lockdowns created a 'shadow pandemic' of ***sexual and gender-based violence*** now affecting more than one in three women and girls worldwide, as well as millions of boys, men, and gender-nonconforming individuals.[63]

Geopolitical Tensions

The pandemic hit the world at a time of ***growing geopolitical vulnerability***. The rules-based global order of the past 70 years was challenged by frequent violations of core international laws, norms and values. Renewed great power competition led to political fragmentation and undermined the international system's efficiency, while nationalism and protectionism strained communities' social

and economic fabric.[64] The pandemic exacerbated some of these trends, threatening to become the measurement by which the efficiency of countries, regions and political systems were judged.[65] Competition in crisis management, research, and vaccine roll-out and distribution fuelled this sentiment. Smaller and mid-size countries had to navigate between political poles while seeking to avoid new dependencies even as a crisis of global proportions requires cooperation rather than competition. At the same time, countries diverted resources away from bilateral international assistance to focus on the domestic pandemic response. Total bilateral aid commitments fell by 17 per cent and disbursements by 2 per cent in 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.[66] Bilateral donors recorded significant falls in overseas development assistance commitments, many of them 40 per cent or more.[67]

Yet, despite this sombre state of global politics, the pandemic also served as an inflection point, an ***opportunity for renewed cooperation*** around key global challenges and threats, with encouraging examples of solidarity and cooperation across countries and regions. They included the rapid and successful multidisciplinary research and development of treatments and vaccines; extensive data and information sharing with the World Health Organization and other public health bodies to disseminate trusted information while combatting misinformation and disinformation; a globally coordinated humanitarian appeal; and COVAX, the global initiative to ensure rapid and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Like all global crises, the pandemic has starkly illustrated the ***interdependence between nations*** and the need for solidarity, based on trust and collective action. It has underscored the message that "to survive in the short term, we need national solidarity – but to survive in the long term, we need global solidarity."[68]

3 IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities, exposing systemic and structural weakness, inequality, and ineptness. However, it has also provided ***windows of opportunity to accelerate necessary change***.[69] Member States, regional and international organizations, the private sector and many communities and civil society organizations have started to adapt. The humanitarian community has begun to adjust its priorities and operations, and the pandemic will have further implications at the systemic, organizational and programmatic levels. Five priorities for transformation and investment are: preparedness, local front-line leadership, equity and inclusion, digital transformation, and partnerships to achieve lasting outcomes.

Prepare for the Unknown

The cost of response dwarfs the cost of preparedness. This mantra has been long known, yet frequently overlooked. While the time and extent of the next pandemic are unknown, its eventual onset is certain, and the global community cannot be caught flat-footed across continents and sectors again. Preparing for the next pandemic is estimated to cost less than $40 billion annually compared to the $9-33 trillion estimated economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.[70] Smart, early and sustained investments in preparedness, anticipation, and organizational and systemic readiness help reduce uncertainty and cost.

GHPF participants noted a tendency to ignore "inconvenient" lessons of public health crises that require systemic and organizational change. In crises, the right answers and responses are often clear. What is lacking is the political will and leadership to translate them into actual policy.[71] And so lessons were learned the hard way once again, at an unprecedented scale: health crises can kill hundreds of thousands, derail growth, accelerate vulnerabilities and threaten social cohesion. The lack of preparedness came at a particularly high price in vulnerable geographic areas, economic sectors, and demographic segments.

Paying the Price of Inaction

The Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB)'s 2019 Annual Report warned of the threat of "a rapidly spreading pandemic due to a lethal respiratory pathogen".[72] It called for seven urgent preparedness measures: (1) heads of government must commit and invest; (2) countries and regional organizations must lead by example; (3) all countries must build strong systems; (4) countries, donors and multilateral institutions must be prepared for the worst; (5) financing institutions must link preparedness with financial risk planning; (6) development assistance funders must create incentives and increase funding for preparedness; and (7) the United Nations must strengthen coordination mechanisms. In its 2020 Annual Report, the GPMB lamented the limited progress in implementing these actions, despite ample opportunity: "Financial and political investments have been insufficient, and we are all paying the price."[73]

This devastating price of inaction must be turned into a compelling imperative for robust and sustained action, including timely and

lasting investments in prevention, preparedness, institutional readiness and early action. Rather than dividing preparedness into fragmented and under-resourced technical initiatives, governments and international organizations should elevate it to a security and strategic policy priority, with dedicated governance capacity to convene, coordinate, and develop policies across technical sectors of response and expertise. Large-scale shocks are systemic in their effects and require nimble, well-connected, whole-of-government approaches. The impact of inaction is as threatening as the original threat itself. A critical part of any national or international preparedness and prevention strategy is investment in community resilience. Crises are managed and vulnerabilities addressed predominately at the community level. GHPF participants also stressed that coping and recovering from crisis is about "livelihoods, livelihoods, livelihoods," which can foster resilience for the next shock.

Lessons Learned and Successfully Applied

Vietnam has been widely praised for its pandemic response. The country's clear and engaging public health campaign embraced technology and social media to disseminate trustworthy information, achieving widespread buy-in to virus containment efforts. Lessons from SARS in 2003-2004 informed preparedness and containment measures: investments in public health increased by an average of 9 per cent between 2000 and 2016, and quarantine measures were based on exposure risk rather than symptoms. These measures gave Vietnam a head start, leading to one of the lowest death tolls from COVID-19.[74]

African nations responded to COVID-19 early, decisively and collectively. Drawing on experiences from previous and concurrent health emergencies, resources were quickly put towards containment and prevention measures like early border closures and high-level taskforces. The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention – born from the 2013-2016 Ebola outbreak – set up the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing to enable quick and widespread testing across the continent. The African Union established the Africa Medical Supplies Platform to facilitate the cost-effective, logistically efficient, and less competitive procurement of medical supplies.[75]

Early action supported by political will and commitment saves lives. GHPF participants commended efforts to implement and scale anticipatory action pilots, with some stressing the need to focus on even earlier detection and investing in foresight analysis to predict and analyse long-term trends and risks. Anticipatory financing and risk-based financing will be critical to build community resilience and preparedness for future crises. Early, transparent and consistent outreach and communication, including through sharing reliable information and engagement by senior leadership, is indispensable for community acceptance, public buy-in and behavioural change.

Anticipation Through Data-Driven Decision-Making

The OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data has been working with the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory to develop a COVID-19 model adapted for use in humanitarian contexts. The model has been used to forecast peak and final outbreak size in order to support short-term operational decision-making in planning and managing the deployment of resources during the pandemic. Model projects are available for several countries, including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan.[76]

Crisis risk management is key.[77] Risks must be systematically identified to reduce their impact and cope with residual effects. Risk models and triggers have become more sophisticated, with new forums to share analysis and lessons learned. However, these mechanisms must be systematically scaled up and tied to concrete steps and actions. Crisis-risk management should be prioritized across organizations and functions. There must be systems for crisis anticipation, conducting gap analyses, and strengthening preparedness and response capacities through emergency surge capacity rosters, trainings, and strategies to engage and support local partners.[78]

Strengthening Emergency Response Capacities of Local Actors

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation, is strengthening the emergency response capacity of local humanitarian actors in Asia. ADPC provides strategic support to strengthen National Public Health Emergency Operation Centres and risk communication, raise awareness to identify risks, and build resilience to disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.[79]

There is no alternative to cross-sector collaboration. GHPF participants called for abandoning siloed approaches, systematically linking prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, and integrating public health emergency management and disaster risk reduction. The message read clearly: "People don't care where help comes from—they just need help". Collaboration needs to start at the earliest planning stages, from scenario-planning and surge capacity assessment to governance, coordination and communication. It should promote integrated, strategic and far-sighted approaches built on collective experiences from Ebola, SARS and now COVID-19. These approaches should cut across disciplines – from policy and research to logistics and communications – and offer platforms to quickly and effectively convene diverse actors. Collaboration requires organizational readiness to work across sectors by examining one's mandate and comparative advantages, as well as systems and administrative processes that facilitate cooperation.

Working Across the Nexus

Through its Fragile Context Programme Approach (FCPA), World Vision is adapting its humanitarian programming in fragile contexts in response to COVID-19. The FCPA brings together humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors to respond flexibly to cyclical and recurrent shocks and stresses in fragile contexts. Programme design is based on detailed scenario planning and built on rigorous context analysis. In Honduras, for example, emergency and FCPA principles are being deployed in urban areas where COVID-19 is adding to pre-existing challenges such as violence and dengue outbreaks.[80]

Crucial health preparedness measures include:[81] accelerating the development of new vaccines as a global common good through research, financing, pooling, collaboration, production and equitable distribution; investing in scientific tools, quickly deployable diagnostics and treatments; improving the global alert system; strengthening field-based capabilities to monitor for troubling pathogens; scaling up diagnostic testing capabilities; building teams of infectious disease first responders and multilateral task forces and conducting large scale simulations; proactively shaping global health through multilateral cooperation; and strengthening the resilience of public health systems, financing structures and capacities, including digital capabilities.

"Building Back Better" and Preparing for Climate Change

The lessons from COVID-19 reinforce the dire need to implement prevention, preparedness and early action measures to combat the climate crisis. Climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and preparedness activities are essential to address short and long-term threats, reduce vulnerabilities, and strengthen resilience to manage future shocks.

The damage caused by COVID-19 is likely to pale in comparison to future losses from global environmental emergencies like climate change and biodiversity loss. "Building back better" from COVID-19 means devising economic recovery packages and policies to lessen the risk of future crises and build resilience for when they occur. For environmental shocks, this involves aligning policies with long-term emission reduction goals, increasing resilience to climate impacts, slowing biodiversity loss and increasing circularity of supply chains.[82]

Invest in Local Solutions and Front-Line Leadership

Local solutions and front-line leadership are about effectiveness and sustainability. The COVID-19 pandemic, like past crises, has shown that grounding interventions in strong local leadership is a necessity. The rise of NGO capacity and volunteerism, advances in information technology and connectivity, and growing local expertise coupled with operational and funding constraints for international aid organizations, have reinforced the drive to engage differently with local communities, civil society, governments and institutions. Despite the continuing inadequacy of funding streams to local actors – only about one per cent of humanitarian funding for the COVID-19 response went directly to local and national NGOs[83] – local humanitarian leadership has succeeded due to the dynamics and advantages of local and community-based crisis management. The direction of change seems clear: partnership not only for more equity and engagement in 'our' operations but with more acceptance of 'their' leadership, expertise, capacities and priorities in managing crises.

Responding on the Front Lines

Local civil-society organizations have been at the forefront of the front-line response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, FUNDACOLVEN, a local civil-society refugee-led organization in Colombia, has provided legal support, essential health services, and economic opportunities to Venezuelan refugees who have been shut out due to border closures. FUNDACOLVEN is just one of many local humanitarian organizations delivering essential care while building trust and understanding with impacted communities through shared lived experiences.[84]

Effective partnerships build on a clear vision of comparative advantages. National and local authorities, NGOs, businesses, civil-society networks, faith-based organizations, community leaders, and other local actors[85] are best positioned to assess and respond to needs. They can engage with communities in a trusted and sustainable way, based on long-term presence and relationships, as well as familiarity with affected populations, circumstances, customs and languages. International actors have a critical role through their influence, networks and resources that can be mobilized to convene and connect stakeholders, build and surge capacity, provide expertise and material support, and conduct advocacy and share risk (in particular around fiscal accountability and transparency). International actors can also support the development of

institutional and voluntary response capacities through technical cooperation and training, by building or scaling up coalitions that can be rapidly mobilized when needed, and by supporting organizational transformation, including through core funding.[86] These comparative advantages are not in competition; they are complementary to and reinforcing of one another.

Shifting the Power

Through the C19 NALPER programme, Christian Aid is empowering local organizations in Afghanistan and Nigeria by providing funding and tools to deliver food, healthcare, and sanitation supplies. Harnessing the strength and reach of local partner organizations, the programme is reaching the most vulnerable communities by placing people at the centre of the COVID-19 response. The programme enhanced the capacity of vulnerable groups to meet their most basic needs through cash vouchers, food parcels, and personal protective equipment during periods of lockdown and travel restrictions.[87]

Through its 'Strengthening Response Capacity and Institutional Development for Excellence' (STRIDE) initiative, Islamic Relief adjusted its organizational priorities to focus on leadership, partnership building, and capacity reinforcement for local actors. The STRIDE initiative developed a standardized organizational approach for assessing and building the capacity of staff, field offices, and local actors.[88]

In Benin, The Hunger Project, in collaboration with USAID, is scaling up its sustainable community-based programme using the 'Epicentre Strategy' to fight hunger, poverty, and food insecurity, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hunger Project helps local communities launch their own programmes to address health and nutrition needs, access to clean drinking water and sanitation, education and literacy, and food security. The programme strategy shows the confidence, capacity, and skills of local actors to act as agents of their own development.[89]

Local partnerships require long-term investment. Despite long-standing commitments to provide more direct funding to local actors,[90] the majority of humanitarian funds continues to pass through layers of intermediaries and is slow to reach the front lines.[91] Administrative costs cut into funds along the intermediary chain, often leaving local actors without means for adequate security, training or equipment.[92] Most funding for local actors is project-based, leading organizations to struggle for survival beyond the programme delivery phase and hindering organizational development and capacity-building, including for transparency and accountability.[93] The inability to meet the "gold standard" of reporting can in turn prevent international actors from working with local actors due to risk management concerns vis-à-vis donors. This vicious cycle creates dependency and gravely uneven power dynamics. Strong local partnerships thus require deliberate ***investment in core organizational development***, including financial management, over multi-year horizons. Such investment will not only strengthen people, communities and systems, but also pave the way for international agencies to exit or repurpose their operations.

Aside from direct funding relationships with local partners, there are also other long-term structural and strategic financing considerations. These include greater and more strategic investment in ***pooled funds*** to ensure resources reach the front lines quickly and efficiently, focusing on longer-term outcomes rather than short-term delivery. Fund managers, including at the UN, need to serve as neutral intermediaries.[94] Making disbursements according to need and

results rather than organizational mandate can create efficiency gains while combating power imbalances. Flexible multi-year funding, including core funding, can ensure organizational sustainability and help build capacity, including for financial management and accountability.[95] And calibrating reporting expectations to the size and capacities of local actors can break bureaucracy's vicious cycle. Donors have a fundamental role to play in incentivizing and enabling this change, just as international organizations do in helping with ***risk pooling, compliance support, or co-funding models***.

Funding Local

The Start Fund Bangladesh disbursed around .55 million GBP through 11 member agencies to strengthen COVID-19 response and adapt quickly to new restrictions and parameters. The fund contributed to halving the amount of time to distribute funds after a COVID-19 alert. In 2020, the fund allocated 100 per cent of COVID-19 response funding to local NGOs. The rapid disbursement of these funds is a significant step in scaling-up locally coordinated responses to the pandemic.[96]

Local and regional platforms and networks are key. 2020's virtual experience has connected more people more quickly, facilitating engagement and exchange while uncovering opportunities for better cooperation at all levels. GHPF partners noted the need to develop ***"communities of hubs"*** for local and national aid organizations to convene and facilitate the exchange of information, knowledge, and experiences; promote empowerment and coalition building among local organizations that amplifies their voices, participation and influence; and facilitate better collaboration with private sector actors, academia and other sectors. Such platforms would also allow for exchange with international and regional actors and could facilitate humanitarian research, writing, and policy making.

Networked Humanitarianism

Over the past decade, the Philippines has been at the forefront of mainstreaming locally led humanitarian response. With support and engagement from international partners and networks such as OCHA and ICVA, the Shared Aid Fund for Emergency Response (SAFER) provided funds to a consortium of local humanitarian partners who ultimately reached 1,400 families in need of support in Manila. Existing networks and partnerships between local and international humanitarian actors in the Philippines allowed COVID-19 programming to happen more swiftly, especially in hard-to-reach areas.[97]

Rethinking local partnership will achieve sustainable humanitarian outcomes. While the world is more globalized and networked than ever, many solutions to global problems – and nearly all solutions to local ones – lie in decentralized, local and community-based initiatives. Empowering, enabling and supporting locally led responses are not questions of political correctness, but of maintaining the ***relevance of international humanitarian aid*** beyond conflict settings in the long-term. This requires not just a different way of working; but a shift in mindset and culture concerning the objectives and outcomes of humanitarian action. International actors are often perceived as "gatekeepers", controlling local responses and occupying a space that should belong to local actors. GHPF participants noted that a key problem of the international aid system is its inability to "work itself, gradually, out of the job". Rather than running programmes according to outcomes defined with donors at headquarters, the system should see its main task as building and supporting local civil-society capacities and networks in a way that strengthens people, communities and systems.

International actors must honestly and fundamentally question their role and aspirations in the existing humanitarian response model: Are they short-term responders (sometimes for decades), at ever-growing cost? Or ***enablers of local leadership and partnerships around multiyear outcomes*** that leave more resilient and strengthened local capacity in place? GHPF participants noted that viewing local action as a means to an end will lead to "business as usual." Thinking of it as an end in itself, however, will lead to the development of "sustainable aid programmes, businesses and civil society". The latter approach would constitute a "devolved network and partnership model", a "new social contract" under which international actors would become catalysts of longer-term outcomes in ***multi-stakeholder value chains*** with local institutions, businesses and communities. Such an approach would be a true paradigm shift, ending "charity mindsets", "panic and forget" attitudes, and "post-colonial" business models.

Supporting and Enabling, rather than Controlling

Through its RISE initiative, Save the Children is strengthening the capacity of local Syrian civil-society organizations to respond to the needs of conflict-affected populations in areas with humanitarian access and travel restrictions. The programme uses a capacity strengthening approach to co-design solutions alongside local Syrian organizations and enables them to play an active role in determining where they need international support. As a result, Save the Children expanded its remote training approaches such as e-learning platforms, webinars, and virtual help desks to provide tools and resources to help local organizations respond to the protection needs of crisis-affected people.[98]

Lead with Equity

An equity lens is indispensable to policy making that addresses the disproportionate impact of the pandemic and pre-existing inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic struck the world amidst already extreme levels of inequality, within and across countries, and posed additional risks to long-term equity and social mobility. The pandemic's health and socio-economic impacts magnified chronic institutional failures to address structural disparities in access to health care and basic services, bringing inequities suffered by overlooked, marginalized or vulnerable communities into even sharper focus. Policy making with an equity lens to address pre-existing or new inequalities is key to mitigating the further rise in inequality.[99] This effort could include targeted interventions to boost investments in health care, education, childcare, and labour markets; creating access to financial services and technology; investing in social protection programmes, safety nets, and social insurance; or prioritizing equity and inclusion, and resilience to future disasters in economic recovery programmes.[100] One GHPF participant stressed, "more equity needs to be built into the conversation; whether on access to food, healthcare, or basic services."

Applying a Gender Equity Lens

In partnership with USAID, Counterpart International has employed an equity lens to elevate the role of women in community-driven service delivery in Niger. Through its Participatory Responsive Governance Program, Counterpart International engaged local religious leaders and civil-society organizations to champion women's inclusion by framing their engagement within a culturally appropriate paradigm and emphasizing the value of consensus-based decision-making. As a result, 40 per cent of programme

participants are now women, and they are directly advocating for improved services and mobilizing resources to foster self-reliant solutions in response to COVID-19.[101]

Humanitarian need amplified by inequality requires a rights-based humanitarian response. Humanitarian needs and suffering are increasingly being framed by situations of acute social injustice, institutional inequality, and state-sanctioned violence against marginalized groups and communities. As needs are amplified by "inequality, abuse, and predatory economics, and conflict", it has been suggested that humanitarian organizations push beyond technical solutions, taking a more rights-based approach to "push within the political sphere for greater public well-being, solidarity, and social justice."[102] Further, the scale, nature, and complexity of needs today demand approaches and partnership models that are based on collaboration, recognize comparative advantages, prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion, and tilt the balance of power in favour of local communities.

Promoting Rights-Based Approaches

The Australian Council for International Development is evaluating ways to champion human rights in humanitarian and development response by promoting rights-based approaches and protection, gender, and inclusion in its policies and programmes. The Council is committed to using a human rights and justice lens to develop and guide humanitarian strategies in areas of crisis.[103]

Humanitarian and long-term programmes for vulnerable and marginalized groups should go hand in hand. Past pandemics have increased income inequality and lowered the employment-to-population ratio for those with basic education.[104] Similar effects from COVID-19 are likely to impede the progress of communities or even societies for years to come by perpetuating inequality, reducing economic and income growth as well as social mobility across generations, and weakening social cohesion over time.[105] College-educated workers are less likely to stop working than those with less education; women are more likely to lose jobs than men; minorities will have less access to entrepreneurial capital to rebuild livelihoods; and school closures and disruptions will have long-term effects on the poorest.[106] Addressing recovery, long-term needs and resilience, including through social protection and health and safety measures, must go hand in hand with humanitarian response. GHPF participants noted that building the resilience of local communities requires looking at the social contract, building trust in institutions, and scaling up support for marginalized groups in insecure places outside of capital cities.

Integrating Protections for the Most Vulnerable

Since its inception, the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation has provided services for more than 3.2 million girls in 17 countries affected by female gender mutilation. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Programme has expanded engagement with member states to develop new resources for future emergencies and integrate prevention and response across sectors and National Action Plans, with respect to gender equality, education, gender-based violence, and health. For example, the Ministry of Health in Uganda, with support from the Joint Programme, integrated prevention of and response to female genital mutilation in the national COVID-19 response and

supported district health action plans. The plan created new guidance and tools to respond to gender-based violence for future emergencies.[107]

Cash Programming

There are clear advantages to using cash assistance in response to the crisis, including for programmes targeting the most vulnerable. They include the speed and scale at which programmes can be expanded and cash support disbursed and the efficiencies it can create by being delivered through a single transfer system addressing multiple needs. Cash has also shown immense value in protecting livelihoods, supporting markets, and helping reinvigorate local economies. And it can enhance the dignity of beneficiaries by enabling people to address their own priorities.[108]

Humanitarian systems and organizations are not immune to structural racism. 2020 witnessed demonstrations and public calls to action in countries North and South to face the realities of social injustice, structural racism and inequality. The humanitarian sector has not been immune to criticism, culminating in calls to "decolonize aid", end "neo-colonial practices" and "Western saviourism", redress the "unequal power relations" of a "charity system", and redesign the "change-resistant" sector. Beneficiaries, partners and staff are calling for more diversity in leadership, ownership, membership, donors, and the design of operations and priorities. Humanitarian structures, funding distribution and operational design and programming need to adapt to become more equitable and inclusive. At an organizational level, this renewed focus presents an opportunity to work towards true diversity in leadership and recruitment, and equitable treatment and career development of staff.

Working Towards Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Save the Children UK, through its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, 'Free to be me', sets out plans to build equity and inclusion for marginalized groups both within and outside the organization. As part of this strategy, Save the Children UK pledged that by the end of 2021, people of colour will make up a quarter of its executive leadership and senior management team and that the organization will reduce its ethnicity pay gap, which currently stands at 4.9 per cent of mean salary.[109]

Realize the Digital Promise

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation in all parts of the world and areas of life. This trend creates opportunity for earlier, faster and potentially more effective humanitarian action. Artificial intelligence can facilitate analysis of vast humanitarian datasets to improve projections and decision-making. Mobile applications, chatbots and social media can create immediate feedback loops with affected people. Remote sensing can speed up the assessment, mapping and monitoring of vulnerabilities. Digital cash can provide rapid and flexible assistance. And biometrics can help establish digital identity and reconnect families. More work can be carried out remotely, more resources can be optimized, and more people can be brought together in an agile and efficient manner. But these opportunities are accompanied by significant challenges, such as building adequate digital infrastructures and capacities; ensuring data privacy, security and protection; combating digital inequality and misinformation; overcoming conflicts of interest in public-private-partnerships; tackling barriers to investment and scaling; and, above all, 'doing no harm' in the digital space.[110]

Accelerating Digital Adoption

The COVID-19 response showcased both the potential and the risks of new and emerging technologies, while simultaneously accelerating their adoption and use. Artificial intelligence facilitated outbreak mapping, diagnosis, and the development of treatments and vaccines.[111] Biometrics, blockchain and digital cash enabled contactless access to aid.[112] Drones delivered medical supplies and testing samples.[113] Chatbots provided vital information and telehealth support.[114] At the same time, concern mounted over data protection and privacy, cybersecurity, personal liberty and misinformation.[115] The massive overnight shift to virtual environments, remote education, videoconferencing and e-commerce also raised fundamental questions about technological preparedness and effectiveness, as well as digital inequality.[116]

Pursuing a Joint Approach to Data Responsibility

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action is the first system-wide guidance to ensure data responsibility in all phases of humanitarian action. Data responsibility is the safe, ethical and effective management of personal and non-personal data for operational response. Humanitarians must avoid causing harm to already vulnerable populations when handling their data, especially where humanitarian emergencies may drive expectations of rapid, potentially untested, technology solutions. More than 250 stakeholders from the humanitarian sector were involved in the development of the guidance.[117]

First and foremost, technology must protect human life and dignity. As noted by a GHPF participant, "while the pandemic creates opportunity, this is not a time for opportunism. We have an obligation to recognize that what we do today will have a lingering impact. We need to go slow in order to go fast." Strong data responsibility, including data protection, must ensure that technology respects people's rights and remains people-centric, accountable and trusted. 'Doing no harm' in the digital sphere presupposes that potential risks are analysed, assessed, and mitigated. Principled aid delivery requires a respected neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian cyberspace. Long-term investments can enable further research into high-potential use-cases, sustainable integration into programmatic efforts, and common standards and protections for research and experimentation. Regulation and governance must catch up with technology to enable its deployment while protecting people's rights.

Technology should be inclusive, put people at the centre and bridge the digital divide. Connecting people to information and services through digital technologies requires internet connectivity, access to basic technology and digital literacy, with a special focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups. Local leadership, bottom-up capacity-building and equal access to opportunity can maximize technology's potential while minimizing its risks. Solutions – from high-tech to "no-tech" – must always follow need, suitability and context. Regular feedback loops with affected communities, thorough pre-deployment and after-action reviews and the transparent sharing of lessons learned, are crucial to assess the need for and effectiveness of a technology solution. Pilot projects should be designed around long-term integration into programmatic efforts and community-led initiatives where appropriate. As one GHPF participant noted, "successful and

responsible deployment of technology does not start from the technology. It starts from the problem. It has the people at the centre."

Aiding Through Connectivity

Social distancing measures imposed to combat the spread of COVID-19 have made connectivity more critical than ever. NetHope, in collaboration with Facebook, has brought organizations such as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) closer to the populations they serve. In Colombia, NRC and NetHope piloted an Omni Channel call centre implemented on existing hotspots to share information and key messages on preventing the spread of COVID-19. The pilot provided vital information about processes and guidance for a safe return for migrants, protection and employment rights.[118]

Humanitarians must focus on building adequate digital ecosystems. Digital technologies rely on the quality and quantity of data and on the skills to manage it safely and effectively. This requires safe, interoperable data-sharing platforms and consistent data-collection methods grounded in secure, responsible administrative systems. Basic compliance with, and training in, best practice for existing technology is foundational to more advanced solutions. Robust cybersecurity is needed to protect proliferating data flows from increasing cyberattacks. Adequate skills and capacities must be in place to maximize systems' utility for decision-making. Additionally, multi-stakeholder partnerships should be built pre-emptively and grounded in shared ethical frameworks.

Building Trust in Data

Together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Government of Switzerland, the OCHA Centre for Data has launched the Humanitarian Data and Trust Initiative to maximize the benefits of humanitarian data and technology while minimizing the risks of doing harm. The initiative aims to accelerate the responsible deployment of data-related technologies, develop shared principles and guidelines around responsible data management, and build trust between parties through strategic dialogue and transparency.[119]

"Remote" shouldn't mean "hands off". For humanitarians, proximity is key for building trust and confidence with people affected by humanitarian crises, conducting needs assessments, and monitoring situations, particularly in low-connectivity and digital literacy environments. Humanitarian action may increasingly involve the delivery of "digital aid packages", ranging from connectivity to hardware, software and digital literacy trainings. But human contact cannot be replaced by technology, and human interaction is indispensable for humanitarians to carry out their work in a principled, sustained and effective manner.

Conveying Trusted Information

Technology can help humanitarian actors identify and track needs, reach at-risk populations from afar, fill healthcare gaps via telemedicine, and provide information on how to stay safe. It can also lead to misinformation and disinformation, hampering relief efforts and putting people at risk of harm. While social media is important for providing large populations with basic information, door-to-door presence is imperative to build trust and buy-in.

The COVID-19 crisis has underscored the importance of clear and consistent public messaging to convey scientific information

to the public and inform safe behaviour. Trusted public information campaigns and communications can help counter the spread of misinformation and protect against stigmatization of marginalized communities. But while risk communication is important, information must be contextually tailored, and communications must be two-way streets.

To help counter the spread of COVID-19 misinformation, the United Nations Department of Global Communications, with support from the IKEA Foundation and Luminate, launched its Verified initiative to deliver trusted information, life-saving fact-based advice, and stories from "the best of humanity".[120]

Think Partnerships. Build Coalitions for Success

Multidisciplinary collaboration is not a choice, it is a necessity. Confronting the impacts of intersecting long-term challenges such as climate change, inequality, or pandemics has stretched national and international response systems to their limits. Addressing increasing fragility, vulnerability and need requires new ways to engage the capacities and expertise of a wider range of actors. Effective partnerships across sectors, hierarchies and disciplines are indispensable. They require the collaboration of governments, cities and communities, civil-society and international organizations, bureaucratic and technical disciplines, the private sector, media, academia, and science. And they require partners to explore strategic labour division, burden sharing and pooling of resources according to their comparative advantages, capacities and expertise; to work in more complementary and integrated ways as predictable shareholders in a value-chain for affected people. The COVID-19 response reaffirmed these imperatives, as humanitarian organizations found new ways to work together, local actors carried the front-line response, businesses lent their production capacities and distribution channels, and research and academia led the development of medical solutions. 2020 highlighted the world's interconnectedness, but also how much more connected we must be. The pandemic should serve as a turning point towards more systematic, predictable and sustained multidisciplinary collaboration to achieve quick, adequate and lasting humanitarian outcomes. For that, GHPF participants stressed, humanitarians must abandon their "fragmented and siloed" approaches.

Working Across Silos

The Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF), a member of the Connecting Business Initiative (CBi), together with the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases, National Task Force on COVID-19, Department of Health, and several other members of the private sector, hosted the country's first COVID-19 Vaccine Logistics Summit. For the first time, the Summit convened the public and private sectors to identify critical gaps and challenges, highlight best practices, and build partnerships to strengthen strategies in preparation for implementing the COVID-19 vaccine distribution programme.[121] PDRF also works in collaboration with the Humanitarian Country Team in the Philippines to ensure coordination of humanitarian interventions.[122] As of February 2021, 55 per cent of all COVID-19 contributions came from the private sector, predominately PDRF and its members.[123]

The private sector has emerged as a crucial new partner. International and domestic businesses are expanding involvement in the humanitarian space to develop commercial opportunities,

improve business assets, reduce risk and loss, or build relationships and influence.[124] Contributions range from continuing operations in areas affected by emergencies and providing products or services, to making financial contributions or improving internal operations of humanitarian organisations.[125] This new type of joint venture can create synergies between humanitarian expertise and the resources and skills of the private sector, dividing labour based on more focused and improved outcomes that contribute to a value chain. Public-private partnerships are already transforming humanitarian action by enabling better communication with communities, improving last mile logistics and employing or scaling up new technologies. However, these partnerships also bear distinct challenges, such as reputational risk, data sensitivity and use, intellectual property and power imbalances.[126] They must always ensure that they work to alleviate humanitarian need and comply with humanitarian principles.

Leveraging the Best of Two Worlds

The Connecting Business initiative (CBi)[127], private sector-driven and OCHA-UNDP-supported, strategically engages the private sector in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. It strengthens and supports private sector networks in humanitarian engagement before, during and after emergencies. In 2020, the 11 CBi Member Networks had a core membership of 3,600 and represented 40,000 Micro-Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises. Together with their partners, all CBi Member Networks addressed the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and responded to 21 other emergencies. Responding to earthquakes, cyclones, political unrest and flooding, companies participated in search and rescue operations, distributed aid, restored power lines, shared information, provided funding, and partnered with governments and aid workers.

The UPS Foundation has worked with GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, to coordinate vaccine delivery to children in hard-to-reach areas of Uganda and Rwanda. This partnership has enabled GAVI and local civil-society organizations to strengthen supply chain initiatives, resulting in regularly scheduled vaccine delivery, significant stock reductions, and an increase in monthly vaccine distribution of over 100,000 vaccines.[128]

Building effective cross-sector partnerships requires time, trust and predictability. Partnerships must add real value towards a clear outcome (e.g., by scaling up capacity; speeding up logistics; or building expertise on the ground). Yet partnerships often form in the midst of a crisis due to a pressing need for immediate action, which bears inherent risks. The capacities, expertise and protocols necessary to collaborate safely and effectively may not be in place, community mistrust may emerge without prior engagement, and a solution may be insufficiently tested or tailored to the specific humanitarian context. Pre-existing partnerships can overcome these risks, ensure mutual accountability in a complex, multi-stakeholder value chain, and lead to a more sustainable and effective response. This means investing in and building trust with partners before crises occur. Partnerships must also be grounded in common challenges, values and envisaged outcomes through clearly articulated visions, roles and responsibilities according to each partner's comparative advantage. Partners must engage in a two-way conversation to understand their partnering organizations' cultures, appreciate priorities and redlines, and determine opportunities, realistic approaches, capacities and timelines.

Long-term Collaboration for Sustainable Change

UNHCR and the IKEA Foundation have built a long-term partnership that has transformed UNHCR's operations in over 16 countries, providing innovative solutions for global emergencies. For example, the alternative shelter prototype initiative, known as the Refugee Housing Unit, has transformed how UNHCR provides shelter to displaced communities, offering a portable, safe, and sturdy structure. Through this long-term collaboration, the IKEA Foundation and UNHCR are making refugee assistance smarter and more sustainable.[129]

Automaticity of collaboration is key. Finding the right partner is fundamental to a shared-value collaboration that can move the needle towards sustainable change. GHPF participants noted that this process also poses new challenges and places demands on coordination and leadership: more convening and facilitating around complementarities, shared analysis, common objectives and agreed roles; less process and top-down management; greater complementarity in mandates and programme implementation; and more focus on outcomes than outputs. To this end, cross-sector networks, platforms and forums are critical to convening actors across disciplines and facilitating exchanges and partnerships among them. Similar to partnerships among local and international actors, effective and sustained partnerships across sectors require "communities of hubs" that allow for multipolar coordination at different levels in different communities. In the event of a crisis, such platforms can activate networks of partners more rapidly and efficiently, with greater automaticity. New platforms and mechanisms should be developed, and existing ones systematically leveraged and scaled up.

Strengthening Networks for Systematic Collaboration

To help tech hubs and their communities share knowledge, collaborate, and achieve human resource and financial stability, AfriLabs has expanded its partnership network, working across silos, to over 48 countries across the continent to build a robust technology and innovation ecosystem. For example, in partnership with the KTN Global Alliance, AfriLabs is working on a rapid analysis of challenges, impact, and innovation response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, focusing on Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. This new partnership aims to support KTN Global Alliance's innovation systems to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and provide lessons and best practices to strengthen the innovation response to future crises.[130]

4 2021 AND BEYOND: PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

2020 was a momentous year. A "dumpster fire", one GHPF participant called it. A "year of consequences that saw the painful cost of not cooperating." Participants acknowledged that multilateralism could be frustrating, and that cooperating to fight COVID-19 was a monumental challenge spanning the public health, education, economic, humanitarian and development sectors, while requiring both urgent and long-term solutions. But the alternative, GHPF contributors stressed, had been painfully proven a "zero-sum game" that risked "unbearable human toll". 2020 will be remembered as a year shaped by death and devastation, recession, lockdowns, nationalism and ever-increasing inequality. But, as noted by one GHPF speaker, 2020 was also defined by "the heroic efforts of people to get through it."

While the pandemic has created and exacerbated vulnerabilities, it may also serve as an accelerator for change.[131] The success of vaccine and treatment research and development could reinvigorate efforts towards multilateral collaboration. Refocused attention on the key role of local actors could translate into progress on long-standing 'localization' commitments. The urgent need to prevent the losses of the socio-economic crisis from becoming permanent could lead to an upscaling in programmes for vulnerable groups and increased focus on preparedness, prevention, organizational readiness and anticipatory action. Investments in responsible and inclusive technology could support earlier, faster and more effective action. The spotlight on social and racial inequities could bolster efforts towards achieving true equality, diversity, and inclusion. Targeted investments in governance, social protection, green economy and digitalization could get us back on track to achieve the SDGs.[132]

Change is a necessity, not a choice. As noted by GHPF participants, the policies adopted as a result of COVID-19 "will be absolutely pivotal". 2020 can become a watershed moment for positive change in the humanitarian system. But this outcome requires systemic, organizational and programmatic transformation. The lessons are there but learning them is not enough. They must be applied; however inconvenient it is to do so.

PREPARE FOR THE UNKNOWN	• Elevate preparedness to a leadership-level security and strategic policy priority with dedicated capacity to convene, coordinate and develop policies across fragmented technical sectors. • Scale up and sustain investment, adapt governance models, and strengthen connectivity among sectors, linkages with financial risk planning, and coordination mechanisms. • Overcome siloed approaches and strengthen community resilience, including by making humanitarian action more complimentary with longer-term efforts to strengthen the structures, policies, and capacities of affected communities to cope with the impacts of global challenges and mega-events. • Invest in predictability: scale up anticipatory action to trigger earlier action and investment, and a rebalancing of prevention and response.
INVEST IN LOCAL SOLUTIONS AND FRONT-LINE LEADERSHIP	• Promote and invest in local solutions and leadership wherever possible, making international efforts and investments more effective and sustainable. • Reframe humanitarian success around the achievement of multiyear outcomes and the comparative advantages of local actors. • Shift towards more direct funding for local actors, including for core organizational development and scaled up investment in pooled funds to ensure that resources reach the front lines quickly and efficiently. • Develop and support platforms that allow local actors to connect, convene, and exchange information, knowledge and experiences.
LEAD WITH EQUITY	• Apply an equity lens across all policymaking to address the pandemic's disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable. • Take a rights-based approach to humanitarian action that includes not only the delivery of aid, but a push towards solidarity, justice, equality and equity. • Link humanitarian action and long-term programmes for vulnerable and marginalized groups. • Combat structural racism and discrimination in the humanitarian system, including by fostering inclusion, elevating diversity and accountability in leadership and governance, and creating platforms for debate and discussion. • Enhance the dignity of beneficiaries and enable them to address their own priorities, including through the increased use of cash programming.

REALIZE THE DIGITAL PROMISE	• Develop a comprehensive practice agenda and strategy to professionalize the responsible use of new and emerging technologies. • Invest in digital readiness and preparedness for humanitarian organizations and actively enhance connectivity, access to basic technology and digital literacy for affected communities in agency programmes, policies and deliverables. • Integrate new and emerging technologies that are responsible, sustainable and inclusive into existing programmatic efforts, continuously measuring their effectiveness according to end-user need.
THINK PARTNERSHIPS. BUILD COALITIONS FOR SUCCESS	• Open-up organizational culture and policies to collaboration with external partners for stronger outcomes and multi-stakeholder value-chains for affected communities. • Foster systematic and sustained collaboration and coordination across sectors and disciplines to build trust and predictability for effective partnerships. • Invest in partnerships with the private sector that can be activated quickly. • Support the creation of platforms, networks and forums to connect different actors, facilitate information exchange, nurture coalition building ("communities of hubs"), and allow partners across sectors to convene as stakeholders in achieving agreed outcomes for affected communities.

AGENDA – GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN POLICY FORUM

DAY 1 – 9 DECEMBER 2020	
9:00AM-10:50AM	**Beyond Health: Political, Socio-Economic and Security Dimensions of the COVID-19 Pandemic** Moderator: **Femi Oke,** Journalist and Broadcaster Panellists: • **Frank Bousquet,** Senior Director, Fragility, Conflict and Violence, World Bank • **Nicole Clifton,** President, Social Impact and The UPS Foundation • **Jan Egeland,** Secretary-General, Norwegian Refugee Council • **Pape Gaye,** President & Chief Executive Officer, IntraHealth International • **John Norris,** Deputy Director for Policy and Strategic Insight, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
10:50AM-11:00AM **Break**	
11:00AM-12:30PM	**Coalitions for Success: New Partnerships and Local Frontline Leadership** Moderator: **Sorcha O'Callaghan,** Director of Programme – Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute Panellists: • **Christina Bennett,** Chief Executive Officer, Start Network • **Anna Ekeledo,** Executive Director, AfriLabs • **Butch Meily, President,** IdeaSpace and Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation • **Ana Patricia Muñoz,** Executive Director, Grupo FARO • **Patrick Saez,** Senior Policy Fellow, Center for Global Development

DAY 2 – 10 DECEMBER 2020	
9:15AM-10:45AM	**Future Proofing: Organizational Readiness and Strategic Crisis Preparedness** Moderator: **Kirsten Gelsdorf,** Director of Global Humanitarian Policy, University of Virginia Panellists: • **Dominique Burgeon,** Director of Emergencies, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations • **Kim Eling,** Senior Expert, Cabinet of Janez Lenarčič, Commissioner for Crisis Management, European Commission • **Pascale Meige,** Director Disasters Climate and Crises (Prevention, Response and Recovery), International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies • **David Nabarro,** Co-Director and Chair of Global Health, Institute of Global Health Innovation, Imperial College London • **Salvatore Vicari,** Regional Humanitarian Affairs Advisor – Middle East, Médecins Sans Frontières
10:45AM-11:00AM **Break**	
11:00AM-12:30PM	**Realizing the Digital Promise: Moving New and Emerging Technologies from Pilots to Practice** Moderator: **Andrew Schroeder,** Vice President of Research and Analysis, Direct Relief Opening Remarks: **Quynh Tran,** Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UNOCHA Panellists: • **John Frank,** Vice President of UN Affairs, Microsoft • **Dakota Gruener,** Executive Director, ID2020 • **Jason A. Lee,** Project Manager, Statistician, Data Analyst, The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory • **Massimo Marelli,** Head of Data Protection Office, International Committee of the Red Cross • **Ruchi Saxena,** Director, India Flying Labs • **Ria Sen,** Disaster Risk Reduction Expert,UN World Food Programme

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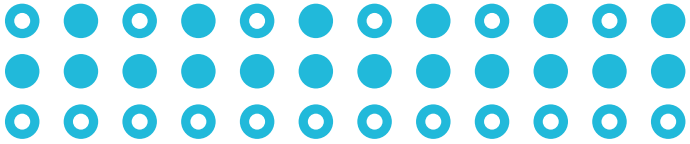

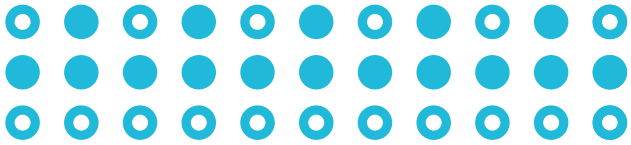

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