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Coming Together While Staying Apart

Facilitating Collective Action
through Trust and Social Connection
in the Age of COVID-19

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Executive Summary

Facing the COVID-19 pandemic requires an unprecedented degree of cooperation between governments and citizens and across all facets of society to implement spatial distancing and other policy measures. Like some other pre-existing challenges humanity faces—such as the environmental crisis and enduring inequality—the pandemic requires that countries and subnational jurisdictions mount a coordinated response that brings social capital and citizen engagement to the fore.

This paper proposes to think about handling the pandemic as a collective action problem that can be alleviated by policies that foster trust and social connection.

The paper discusses how trust in government may support a sense of social connection and thus help bring about an effective collective action response to the crisis. Implementing rapid changes in economic and social behavior is critical in blunting the impact of the virus and preventing subsequent waves of infection. Establishing mechanisms for communication and cooperation will also lay the groundwork for tackling the environmental crisis and building greener, more equitable societies.

Policy and institutional recommendations are presented according to a three-layered pandemic response generally corresponding to short-, medium-, and long-term needs. This paper focuses on building connection and cooperation as means to bring about better health and socioeconomic outcomes. Many factors outside the paper's scope, such as health policy choices, will greatly affect the outcomes. As such, the paper explores the role of trust, communication, and collaboration conditional on sound health and economic policy choices.



RESPONSE PHASE

Flattening the curve and protecting citizens and the economic and social fabric of the country from permanent damage.

- **To increase trust, proactively share information** on health and fiscal issues, as well as government decision-making processes and policy responses
- **Engage the population** in confronting the pandemic by collaborating with communities and building feedback loops through social connection
- **Foster a sense of community** by implementing emergency fiscal measures and programs, ensuring continuity of the provision of essential goods and services, and creating incentives for collective action

RESTART AND RECOVERY

Resuming economic activity while preventing subsequent waves of infection and mitigating the pandemic's effects.

- **Facilitate economic recovery** by working with stakeholders to co-create updated guidelines on economic and social activity that reflect some degree of spatial distancing
- **Prevent a resurgence of the virus** via strategic communications, spatial distancing, social safety nets, and access to healthcare
- **Strengthen long-term state capabilities** by institutionalizing crisis-response measures

RECONSTRUCTION AND RESILIENCE

Far-sighted solutions that solve multiple problems will accelerate the transition to more resilient societies.

- **Strengthen crisis response capabilities** by revising planning frameworks, empowering women, and protecting vulnerable groups, in the context of a response that prioritizes sustainable solutions and investments
- **Maintain citizen engagement and collective action** by reorienting public expenditure, protecting civic space, and empowering citizens



MOTIVATION

Trust in Government and the Pandemic Response

Governments around the world have had varying levels of success in controlling the rapidly evolving COVID-19 crisis. Some countries “flattened the curve” relatively quickly, but in some cases a sharp spike or rebound in infections happened later. Many factors have been cited as key to explaining these variations. While the definitive evaluation will only be possible after the pandemic ends and various factors can be considered, emerging experience suggests the ability to mobilize a society-wide response is one of them. Governments that have been relatively successful in containing the virus have generally made timely decisions with demonstrable results and have communicated with and engaged their citizens effectively. Observers have suggested that this underscores the key role of trust-building in the virus response.

The role of trust in government has figured prominently in media coverage of government responses to the pandemic, with a range of suggestions as to the direction of causality and the type of effects. The most common argument is that “high levels of trust seem to be a common feature of countries with the most effective... responses.”¹ In the words of an Uruguayan pensioner, “the government trusts me to behave, and I trust the government to look after me.”² However, others have argued that some societies, such as the Dutch and the Swedes, may have been lulled into a false sense of security because of high trust in government and questionable choices made early in the pandemic.³ Conversely, it has been suggested that distrust in dysfunctional systems, such as in Lebanon, may have paradoxically helped, as citizens realized that they cannot rely on their governments and must take precautions themselves.⁴ At the same time, others have posited that not only does trust affect the pandemic response, but also vice versa. Initially, the pandemic – like any major catastrophe or war – may produce a “rally-around-the flag” effect, when the trust in government spikes: “When people are... afraid,

1 Foreign Policy. 2020. “The Secret to Coronavirus Success is Trust.” April 15. <https://bit.ly/39BUBbX>

2 Economist. 2020. “How Uruguay has coped with covid-19: High trust and low density help.” June 18. <https://econ.st/2XoEwlg>

3 Economist. 2020. “Do low-trust societies do better in a pandemic?” May 2. <https://econ.st/2P8dbyM>

4 Washington Post. 2020. “Lebanon is in a big mess. But on coronavirus, it’s doing something right.” April 22. <https://wapo.st/3oVU8xe>



they tend to trust their governments, because [not to]... is too much to bear.”⁵ Yet trust in government may sharply decline if the pandemic response falters, and this effect may persist.⁶

An initial look at the data would suggest there is no apparent correlation between trust and the pandemic response. Table 1 sorts countries according to whether people trusted or distrusted their governments as of fall 2019, and whether the countries have managed to control the pandemic as of end-June 2020. The trust data comes from the Edelman Trust Barometer, which asked respondents to rate how much they trust government “to do what is right.”⁷ The rows in the matrix correspond to the effectiveness of the COVID-19 response, as indicated by a status of “red” (ineffective) vs. “yellow” or “green” (relatively effective).⁸ At a first glance, the table may suggest that there is no relationship between trust and success in fighting the pandemic: many countries with high trust have seen successes but also failures, and vice versa.

Table 1. Trust in Government vs. Effectiveness of Government Response

	Distrust in Government < 50% trusts	Trust in Government 60%+ trusts
Current COVID Status is Red	Brazil Russia South Africa US	India Indonesia
Current COVID Status is Green or Yellow	Australia Italy Japan Spain	China Singapore Thailand Vietnam

5 New York Times. 2020. “Coronavirus Has Lifted Leaders Everywhere. Don’t Expect That to Last.” April 15. <https://nyti.ms/3oZDPzn>

6 Washington Post. 2020. “Coronavirus will undermine trust in government, ‘scarring body and mind’ for decades, research finds.” July 5, 2020. <https://wapo.st/2XarmYN>

7 Data and methodology at <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer>.

8 Data and methodology at www.endcoronavirus.org.



Yet the lack of a readily-apparent bivariate correlation may also indicate that the relationship between trust and pandemic response is more complex, with many other intervening variables, as well as the inherent limitations in the quantitative data. First, the data on the pandemic response are highly dynamic. For example, three months ago, Italy and Spain would have been in the red quadrant, but as of this writing, they are in the green one, having scored some initial victories against the virus; this may change again if there is a second wave of infections. Similarly, trust has its own dynamics, while we lack the comparative data across countries that would capture month-by-month fluctuations in trust. There are further limitations in the trust data: researchers have long been aware of the apparently high level of trust in government in (some) authoritarian and collectivist countries, possibly due to preference falsification. In addition, a single measure of trust may aggregate trust in government across various levels (central vs. local), which represent different competencies, structures, and leadership styles. Given the complexity and data limitations, a sound logically consistent framework is required to begin disentangle the relationship between trust in government and the pandemic response.

This paper proposes a way to think systematically about the relationship between trust in government and the society's ability to fight the pandemic, with an emphasis on the policy implications. The paper mostly treats the pandemic response as the dependent variable and asks how trust in government can influence the government's success in containing the virus. At the same time, it recognizes the possibility of the reverse causality as well, where the pandemic response affects the evolving level of trust in government. The paper first defines trust, and then offers a simple framework to think about the pandemic response as a collective action problem, with trust and social connection as possible factors that help overcome it. Then, the paper systematizes policies to facilitate collective action through strengthening trust and social connection, while considering the different contexts of the response, recovery, and rebuilding phases.



Defining Trust

Trust is intangible and multi-dimensional, which makes it difficult to define and measure. Citizens may trust their local officials significantly more or less than those of the central government, depending on the local context, which may vary widely across a country. They may have greater trust in a government’s ability to solve a technical problem rather than a political one, perhaps reflecting greater trust in the bureaucracy than the political elites, or vice versa. Trust may shift gradually over time, or change rather quickly, as shown in Figure 1, which plots the degree of public trust in politicians.

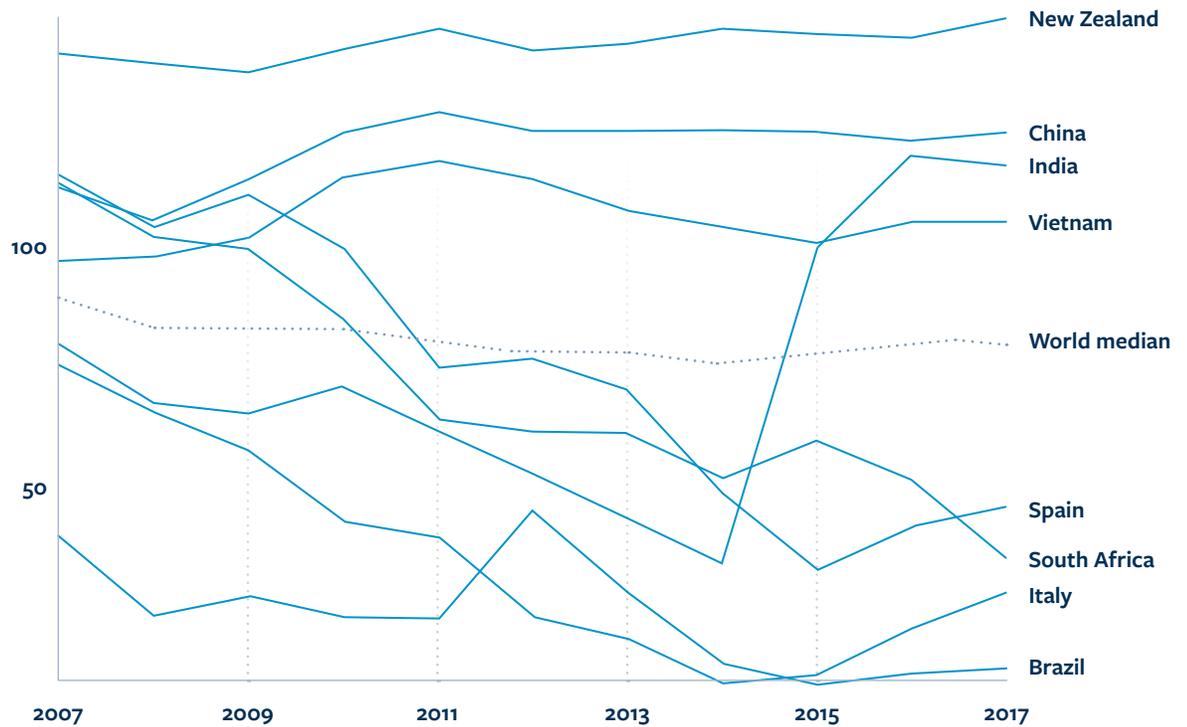
This paper mostly focuses on trust in government, as outlined in Box 1, while recognizing that other dimensions of trust may also affect the pandemic response. Trust in government combines two key aspects: trust in the capacity and competence of the bureaucracy, and trust in the current political leadership to make good policy choices.⁹ While trust in government is the focus of this

9 Fukuyama, Francis. 2020. “The Thing that Determines a Country’s Resistance to the Coronavirus.” *The Atlantic*, March 30. <https://bit.ly/3gaAeF3>



paper, other forms of trust also matter a great deal for pandemic outcomes. In general, we can surmise that individuals are likely to base behavioral decisions on the information they receive from the sources they trust the most—which may be preferred media outlets, friends and family, religious leaders, technical experts, and/or others. In cases where non-governmental sources are providing erroneous information, it becomes even more important for government actors to counteract this via effective official communications. Similarly, the existence of credible non-governmental sources of information may be particularly salient in countries where trust in government is especially low, such as states affected by fragility, conflict, and violence.

Figure 1. Public Trust in Politicians, Global Ranking (1 is best)



Source: govdata360.worldbank.org.



Box 1

Defining Trust in Government

Trust is a complex concept with various dimensions. The 2017 World Development Report defines trust as “the probability that an actor assigns to other actors of delivering on their commitment, conditional on their past behavior.”¹⁰ The OECD definition of trust, “a person’s belief that another person or institution will act consistently with their expectations of positive behavior,”¹¹ has a more normative flavor. Reflecting the broader literature on trust, in both cases there is a distinction between interpersonal trust (trust among individuals) and trust in institutions.

This paper focuses on trust in public institutions, encompassing both the question of whether institutions are perceived to be competent and effective (e.g. in stopping the pandemic), and whether they are perceived to operate consistently with a set of values that reflect integrity and fairness (e.g. telling the truth, protecting citizens’ rights). For the purposes here, “institutions” refers to government bodies, such as ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), as well as politicians and public servants who lead and populate them. This is a narrower definition than the more abstract understanding of institutions advanced by North (1991) that encompasses the formal rules and informal constraints that govern

¹⁰ World Bank. 2017. *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law*. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-0950-7. See p. 55.

¹¹ OECD. 2017. *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264278219-en>.



political, economic, and social activity.¹²

The 2017 World Development Report also highlights the dynamic nature of trust, arguing that trust may rise as a function of the government repeatedly delivering on commitments. It uses the traditional prisoner’s dilemma game to illustrate the role of trust in facilitating collective action. While non-cooperation is the rational choice for actors in a one-off game due to lack of mutual trust, in a repeated game, building trust leads to cooperative behavior that is ultimately better for both actors.

There is an ongoing effort to compile good survey data on trust in government. A lot of the data comes from non-official surveys with small samples, making reliable cross-country comparisons difficult. The OECD has attempted to aggregate data, and its most recent report finds that only about 43 percent of OECD citizens trust their governments.¹³ The 2020 Spring Update of the Edelman Trust Barometer found a record-high percent of people saying they trust their government, an increase presumably related to the pandemic. The analysis released with the data also notes that historically, large trust gains often disappear quickly. This suggests that while governments may get a bump in trust as people look to them as the only actor able to organize a whole-of-society crisis response, they may have only a small window to demonstrate that they deserve it.

¹² North, Douglass. 1991. “Institutions.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 5(1): 97-112.

¹³ OECD. 2020. *How’s Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9870c393-en>. In May 2020, 63 percent of respondents said they trust government, the highest since the survey began 20 years ago. Source: “Edelman Trust Barometer 2020.” Edelman. <https://bit.ly/2Ex24or>



TOWARD A FRAMEWORK

Collective Action as the Link Between the Pandemic Response and Trust in Government

This paper proposes to think about handling the pandemic as a collective action problem that can be alleviated by policies that foster trust and social connection.

This section outlines a simple framework in which handling the pandemic requires solving a collective action problem. It then argues that trust and social connection can facilitate overcoming this problem. The next section derives key themes from this framework that affect policy design for a better pandemic response. The following section systematizes various policies that foster trust and social connection and thus facilitate handling the pandemic in its three phases: response, recovery, and rebuilding.

Handling the Pandemic as a Collective Action Problem

When an outbreak reaches pandemic status, eradicating it becomes a collective action problem. A collective action problem refers to a situation in which the costs of individual action are not fully internalized by the individual but are imposed on the society as a whole. In the context of a pandemic, young and healthy individuals may feel that their own risk of falling seriously ill with COVID-19 is low and therefore their individual costs of physical distancing outweigh the individual benefits. However, by not observing spatial distancing, they may be imposing external costs on the society at large by acting as potential vectors of transmission and further prolonging the pandemic.

The “free riders” who reap health benefits from the slower rate of transmission brought about by the dedicated group may even profit economically, as they continue to earn income and potentially exploit new opportunities that arise in the changed business landscape. Sustained effort by the government and private sector to mount a healthcare response, and vigilance among a dedicated segment of the population (e.g. mask wearing, spatial distancing) will slow but not stop



the spread if others continue with business as usual. Meanwhile, those who are making sacrifices by altering their behavior and losing income or opportunities will find that there is no end in sight, because the free riders are keeping the viral threat alive. Over time this could diminish their motivation to sacrifice for the good of the whole, and the pandemic would continue indefinitely (e.g. until a vaccine is developed and rolled out). A pandemic will continue to spread as long as it can readily find hosts, and with COVID-19, small outbreaks have rapidly led to exponential spread in many contexts.

To respond to the crisis, individuals and other stakeholders, such as businesses, are asked to undertake costly action that serves the common interests of the people. Societies must therefore strive to design a response that can garner cooperation from all—citizens,¹⁴ the private sector, subnational governments, community leaders and organizations, the media, and international stakeholders. To do so effectively, any set of policies must address a collective action problem. Effective responses to the crisis benefit from a set of policies that incentivize a high degree of societal cohesion, behavior change, and coordinated mobilization of resources.

The complexity of the crisis suggests a need for systems thinking. For instance, without a coordinated response, subnational governments and other actors, such as private hospitals, may compete against each other for tests or medical supplies, driving up prices and creating inefficiencies. Individuals or localities may be tempted to hoard food, masks, sanitizer, or other essentials, disrupting supply chains and causing unnecessary shortages. A shared sense of the basic features of the crisis may be necessary to motivate different groups to play constructive roles in solving it. Similar dynamics may play out at the international level. In short, this is a global challenge that requires a multifaceted, coordinated response within and across countries. Thinking about the pandemic as a collective action problem requiring a whole-of-society response provides a conceptual framework for policy design.

14 “Citizens” are understood as the ultimate client of government and/or development institutions’ and private sector interventions in a country as defined in the World Bank’s Citizen Engagement Framework. See: Manroth, Astrid, Zenaida Hernandez, Harika Masud, Jad Zakhour, Miguel Rebolledo, Syed A. Mahmood, Aaron Seyedian, Qays Hamad, and Tiago Peixoto. 2014. *Strategic framework for mainstreaming citizen engagement in World Bank Group operations: engaging with citizens for improved results* (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. <https://bit.ly/39BV0Lv>



The Role of Trust and Social Connection in Facilitating Collective Action

The way that stakeholders perceive the government can play a major part in how they evaluate the incentives they face, and consequently in their actions. This includes their perceptions of the soundness of government policy, the reliability of official information, the ability of the government to implement stated policies, and the likelihood of the government following through on its promises. This may in turn influence whether they choose collaboration over self-interested behavior. How stakeholders assess the government's intentions (whether government seems to put the public interest first) also impacts these perceptions. The role of trust and potential strategies to increase it therefore merit serious consideration, even if trust in government is not strictly necessary nor sufficient on its own to bring about positive outcomes from a pandemic response.

Mobilizing individuals, households, and businesses to be part of the solution through voluntary compliance, and overcoming free rider problems, requires some degree of social cohesion and connection. Some countries have attempted to build a sense of connection through gestures that send a literal or symbolic message that everyone is in the fight together. For example, in Rwanda, the government announced that Cabinet Members, Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Public Institutions, and other senior officials would forgo their salaries for the month of April "in solidarity with the most affected Rwandans".¹⁵ Protests against lockdowns and other measures in the U.S. have underscored the challenge of sustaining public cooperation in a politically polarized society.

Eradicating the virus requires effective testing, contact tracing, isolation, and advances in healthcare, which in themselves have elements that depend upon trust and social connection. Because everyone continues to be at risk as long as the virus remains active in any one place, it is in the collective interest for countries and communities to share data on transmission, outcomes, and medical research, and to collaborate on contact tracing. Individuals may also need to share information on their health status or social contacts. However, stakeholders face various disincentives to cooperate: a company may seek windfall profits from developing a vaccine,



or an individual may have concerns about data privacy. The government's role is to use policies that build social connection and change incentives so that stakeholders opt for collaboration. Cooperation, in turn, enables data collection and feedback that supports governments' ability to make informed policy decisions.

High levels of trust in government institutions and a strong sense of common purpose may help governments and citizens to enact a coordinated response to COVID-19. According to South Korea's vice health minister, "subduing the outbreak required keeping citizens fully informed and asking for their cooperation."¹⁶ Though governments are adopting some coercive measures, voluntary compliance is an important element in successfully implementing the key mitigation measures (see Box 2). Slowing the spread of the virus requires that individuals to some extent may need to forgo income, daily necessities, and human interaction, implying varying degrees of hardship. Mask wearing, handwashing, limiting travel, physical distancing when in public, self-quarantine for the sick or exposed, and across-the-board stay at home orders require that people cooperate.

¹⁶ Repeated public messaging about what is expected of citizens "instills a near-wartime sense of common purpose" and has led to high levels of awareness and voluntary compliance. Source: New York Times. 2020. "How South Korea Flattened the Curve." March 23. <https://nyti.ms/2P7z2yh>



Box 2

Legitimacy and Trust in the Time of the Pandemic

A recent paper by Stuti Khemani points to a “windfall of legitimacy” that governments have reaped since the onset of the pandemic, which they can either waste, seize to facilitate a shift toward authoritarianism, or take advantage of to build trust and social cohesion more sustainably. This legitimacy windfall has aided lower income countries that entered the crisis with relatively low levels of trust, and partly owing to this, voluntary compliance with non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g. spatial distancing) has been fairly widespread. This counter-intuitive observation is attributed to the notion that “responses observed in other countries and the immediate risk to life” posed by the virus prompt a revised set of beliefs about how institutions are behaving. However, countries with high levels of political polarization may have relatively lower levels of legitimacy to draw upon in addressing the pandemic. Bureaucratic strength, on the other hand, may help governments get around the problem of political polarization.

This analysis underscores the complex and dynamic nature of trust. While people in lower income countries are more likely to believe that corruption in their country is pervasive, which is correlated with lower levels of trust, they are also more likely than people in wealthier countries to believe in the *potential* of government to improve their lives, and to ascribe a broader legitimate role for government in the economy and service delivery. With this in mind, the paper puts forward several key priorities for governments and their partners, including inter alia strengthening local media and using communication (of credible, nonideological, and nonpolitical knowledge) strategically to shift norms.

Source: Khemani, Stuti. 2020. “An Opportunity to Build Legitimacy and Trust in Public Institutions in the Time of COVID-19.” Research & Policy Briefs from the World Bank Malaysia Hub, No. 32. May 4. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://bit.ly/3jODCaS>



Some countries are entering the crisis with a very low base of social connection and trust. In these cases, the challenge is compounded, but key principles of transparency, citizen engagement, and strategic communications still apply. It may be useful for governments to engage with respected non-governmental leaders (e.g. technical experts, or community or religious figures) who can amplify public health messages and make the case for key policy measures. Misinformation can be a particular challenge in FCV environments. In Burkina Faso, for example, widespread perceptions that the virus is a conspiracy have been fueled by rumors circulating on social media (as was also common during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa). A Burkinabe doctor and public health lecturer who has been hosting a weekly talk show to raise awareness opined to a news outlet that “unless we create movement and engagement with the communities so they are empowered to take control of their own health, we can build whatever we want—it won’t work.”¹⁷



WHAT CAN BE DONE

Policy Options for Facilitating Collective Action through Trust and Social Connection

Governments have a range of options for building a sense of common purpose. While appropriate strategies are context-dependent, several key themes seem relevant. Table 2 lists the most important ones. Each of these themes is discussed in greater detail below, with some country examples. Successful responses generally leverage a society’s existing strengths and assets, which look a bit different in each context, again implying the government’s role in orienting diverse stakeholders toward a common goal. This coordination job is made easier when there is trust that the government is ethical and competent enough to fulfil its role.

Table 2. Key Themes to Consider in Developing Policy Responses

Key Themes	
Transparency	sharing transmission data, fiscal data, research, decision-making processes and assumptions
Strategic Communications	creating a common understanding of the problem and the actions being taken
Engagement	facilitating a dialogue and collaborative relationship with stakeholders; listening to communities; fostering buy-in
Incentives	“carrots and sticks” to encourage cooperation
Coordination	vertical and horizontal
Responsiveness and Accountability	increasing trust via positive outcomes



TRANSPARENCY

Transparency of the government response—in terms of health and fiscal data, as well as policies and decision making—seems to be a key ingredient in most successful cases. For example, in its COVID-19 response, Vietnam has moved in the direction of transparency while implementing strict controls and swiftly appealing to a sense of common purpose. While the government quickly mobilized military and security forces, it also implemented a creative public education campaign and adopted a shift toward greater transparency.¹⁸ “Ministers give daily press briefings, often broadcast on state television; telecommunications providers send regular text message updates to users; and the government’s health warnings are even translated for expatriates.” Following years of declining trust, the government has seized this opportunity to rebuild its legitimacy in the eyes of citizens and foster an “all in it together” spirit.¹⁹ Apparently due to its proactive response, which succeeded in containing the spread of the disease (albeit raising some questions about whether it was at times too coercive), as of June 5, Vietnam has no confirmed COVID-19 deaths.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Governments that have prioritized the communication of accurate, credible, and timely information about the status of the pandemic and the government response, the expectations for citizens, and the support available have generally fared better. Citizens face daily decisions about their actions and weigh the costs and benefits of compliance. New Zealand’s government has been widely praised for its clear communications approach, which seems to have been a key part of its ability to effectively eliminate the virus (as of June 2020). In low capacity or FCV environments, there may be a significant communications role for international partners. In addition to providing humanitarian relief and health-related services, their roles may include serving as a credible source of information in the absence of trusted local sources. This includes information on how and where the pandemic is spreading, and what citizens can do to protect themselves and contribute to the collective good.

¹⁸ The Nation. 2020. “Vietnam May Have the Most Effective Response to COVID-19.” April 24. <https://bit.ly/3jODrwh>

¹⁹ Foreign Policy. 2020. “The Coronavirus Loosens Lips in Hanoi.” April 15.



ENGAGEMENT

Engagement refers to facilitating a two-way dialogue with stakeholders about their needs and concerns, and involving them in creating and implementing solutions.

In Brazil, citizens can submit ideas on COVID-19 legislative responses via an e-government portal. Moreover, the importance of listening to communities is illustrated by Liberia's experience in the 2014 Ebola outbreak. Trust in government was at a low point when the crisis hit. Strategies imposed purely in a top-down fashion—such as reliance on large field hospitals for Ebola patients—generated resentment at the community level. Once the national response became better coordinated with community-driven solutions, the spread of the disease began to slow.²⁰ The lesson learned is that while national leadership is indispensable, it is more effective when merged with local solutions that generate voluntary compliance and cooperation.

INCENTIVES

Each country will seek a balance of “carrots and sticks” to incentivize compliance.

Governments can provide positive incentives such as grants to businesses, enabling them to keep workers on the payroll while following spatial distancing guidelines. An ability to draw on a sense of civic duty, given the inconvenience or even extreme degree of sacrifice these measures can entail, presumably facilitates the response.²¹ Governments are also choosing to impose various levels or combinations of negative incentives, e.g. fines or even jail time, for noncompliance. An effective balance of carrots vs. sticks depends in part on the financial resources available, the capacity to enforce various measures, the popularity or legitimacy of key leaders, and the level of social cohesion, which influences the degree to which the government response may need to be relatively heavy-handed or can have a lighter touch (i.e. how able and willing people are to cooperate voluntarily).

²⁰ Lake, Britt. 2020. “Citizen Input Matters in the Fight Against COVID-19.” Feedback Labs (blog), April 3. <https://bit.ly/2X7wnRA>

²¹ John M. Barrios, Efraim Benmelech, Yael V. Hochberg, Paola Sapienza, Luigi Zingales. 2020. *Civic Capital and Social Distancing During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, NBER Working Paper 27320, June. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w27320.pdf>



COORDINATION

Facilitating coordination of governmental and non-governmental efforts is a key part of government's role. Thailand's experience may hold lessons for some countries. In the newly released Global COVID-19 Index²², Thailand ranks among the most successful countries in responding to the pandemic. Although it was the first country after China to have a confirmed COVID-19 case, as of June 5 it had had only around 3,000 cases and 58 deaths. A significant part of the explanation seems to lie with its enormous and pre-existing cadre of over one million Village Health Volunteers, community workers around the country who now educate their neighbors about COVID-19 prevention measures, take temperatures, monitor quarantines, and watch for new outbreaks.²³ Their role underscores the value of community-level efforts based in existing networks or institutions. Moreover, if the emphasis is on transmission prevention and monitoring, locally-based efforts can be relatively low-tech and low-cost, and potentially less dependent on a strong central government response in cases where trust in the central government is low. In addition to managing vertical relationships, effective horizontal coordination across government agencies is key in order to marshal the multi-sectoral response that a pandemic crisis requires.

RESPONSIVENESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Effectively responding to problems and demonstrating accountability when things go poorly tends to build trust. For example, South Korea's government pivoted to a more concerted pandemic response after more than one million people signed a petition on an official platform demanding the removal of the president from office.²⁴ Moreover, provision of tangible benefits to citizens, such as equitable safety nets, could also be effective in addressing low initial levels of trust by showing responsiveness to concrete needs. This has been proposed in response

22 Data and methodology available at <https://covid19.pemandu.org/>

23 Kuhakan, Jiraporn and Paul Wongcha-um. 2020. "Thailand's one million health volunteers hailed as coronavirus heroes." Reuters, June 3. <https://reut.rs/31d5RrB>

24 "The platform, which is operated by the Presidential Blue House, acts as a communication channel between the South Korean government and the public. The government is required to provide comments on any petition that gains more than 200,000 signatures in 30 days." Source: Kang, Tae-jun. 2020. "Public anger swells in South Korea over coronavirus outbreak." The Diplomat, Feb. 28. <https://bit.ly/2DcSqPU>



to the Ebola outbreak in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance.²⁵ Indeed, provision of services may be “the primary vehicle to create trust and confidence in governments. Ensuring equal access to services, and avoiding the perception of exclusion of certain groups, help minimize the grievances that undermine the legitimacy of local and national authorities. Equitable service delivery reduces competition among groups and helps maintain the popular trust that is key to mobilizing society-wide efforts to combat the virus.”²⁶ Also, corruption and fraud can easily flourish during a crisis, when large payments need to be expedited and normal procedures may be circumvented; sustaining trust may require extreme vigilance to prevent funds from being siphoned off by corrupt actors.²⁷

25 Bisca, Paul M. and Paul Vance. 2019. “Can public works help fight Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo?” Brookings Institution (blog), July 31. <https://brook.gs/2Dkown>

26 Bousquet, Franck and Oscar Fernandez-Taranco. 2020. “COVID-19 in Fragile Settings: Ensuring a Conflict-Sensitive Response.” United Nations (blog), undated. <https://bit.ly/3f8nCNl>

27 Rhodes, Natalie. 2020. “Coronavirus: The perfect incubator for corruption in our health systems? 7 key COVID-19 points to consider.” Transparency International, article March 13. <https://bit.ly/2X5zERq>



Systematizing Policies to Facilitate Collective Action Through Trust and Social Connection in a Pandemic

Many policies that foster trust and social connection help solve the collective action problem posed by the pandemic. There are several cross-cutting requirements for sound policy design in the COVID-19 era. First, governments would do best to offer clear, credible, and timely information to citizens so they can make informed choices about individual behavior. Second, policies should be designed with sensitivity to existing inequities, such as relating to gender and vulnerable or marginalized groups. Third, given the likely prominent role of technology, issues around privacy and data security should be given particular attention. The most successful governments will practice listening, adapting, and responding to the needs of their citizens, thus crafting a “best fit” approach. Last but not least, it is important to take a long view. In the context of climate change and persistent socioeconomic inequality, governments would do best to think not only of today’s emergency, but also build their capacity to respond to shocks that will come next. For better or worse, innovations and processes that emerge to fight the virus may become “baked” into governance norms. Moreover, seizing this moment to build a sense of shared purpose and create mechanisms for collective action could help countries tackle the crises of climate change and persistent socioeconomic inequality, thus propelling the transition to greener, more resilient societies.

The remainder of this paper examines the role of trust and social connection in a three-layered pandemic response generally corresponding to short-, medium, and long-term needs: *Response; Restart and Recovery; and Reconstruction and Resilience.* This said, in a pandemic, the three phases do not have clearly demarcated lines; in practice, they may significantly overlap and even blend together, and countries may revert to earlier phases in response to rising infection rates. However, organizing the types of policies along these phases provides analytical clarity. In addition, governments would do well to see the response to the crisis in the context of recovery and the need to build the capabilities to deal with future shocks.



Response

In the Response phase, the focus is on detecting and controlling the virus as well as protecting citizens and the economic and social fabric of the country from permanent damage. Lessons from successful countries and previous crises underscore the importance of a combination of top-down and bottom-up solutions, with strong horizontal and vertical coordination. Fostering social connection and finding the right balance of “carrots” and “sticks” to encourage cooperation given the political context can nudge societal behavior toward helpful responses. Technology will be a part of the answer in designing mechanisms for social connection, but not a silver bullet. Technological responses can only be effective if they change incentives. In turn, technological initiatives can change incentives when they are rooted in accountable institutions and community cooperation.

Proactively Share Information to Increase Trust and Social Connection

Government transparency about the actions it is taking and the information shaping policy decisions can help build credibility and support citizens’ willingness to forgo short-term self-interest. Governments can prioritize transparency in several key respects: transparency of health-related information; in fiscal matters; and of decision-making processes and policy responses. This involves clearly and proactively communicating timely, accurate information about the pandemic itself (e.g. transmission data, where to access testing and treatment, contact tracing efforts); about COVID-19-related spending; and about government responses and the decision-making process.



Transparency of health-related information	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Proactively communicate information about virus transmission, where to access testing and treatment, and contact tracing efforts (online and offline)</p> <p>Appoint a single entity to coordinate central government’s health messaging and ensure consistent, reliable, timely dissemination of information</p> <p>In communications, place value both on “discovery” (rigorous surveillance of what is happening on the ground) and “disclosure”—(sharing information on what is known and the steps being taken), but also on the process and status of efforts to find out what is truly happening (the “known unknowns”)</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	<p>Citizens see rapid action and feel confident that the government is taking adequate steps to protect public health, and they know where to go for help</p>
Transparency on fiscal matters	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Prepare and implement a communication plan on COVID-19 fiscal measures (online and offline)</p> <p>Enable detailed monitoring of disbursement and expenditure of emergency relief and other COVID-19 activities by releasing timely data in accessible formats; publish COVID-19-related procurement information</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	<p>Citizens can access information on and scrutinize COVID-19-related fiscal measures, thus increasing accountability</p> <p>Initial development of transparency assets</p>
Transparency of the decision-making process and policy response	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Clearly communicate who is making decisions and what the deliberative process is</p> <p>Clearly communicate the steps the government is taking via press briefings, press releases, speeches, online dashboards, direct messaging to citizens (e.g. text messages)</p> <p>Pay attention to data privacy concerns and protect civil liberties; ensure citizen consent in health data collection efforts; develop rules to govern data collection, how long data is kept, how it is used; ensure measures are time-bound and restricted to essential purposes</p> <p>Safeguard media freedom; ensure related health safeguard restrictions are given an expiry date</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	<p>Faith in government institutions increases, because people know the government is acting effectively; the decision-making process is clear and inclusive; individual rights are protected</p> <p>If infection rates begin to increase again, governments are equipped with the strategies to respond</p> <p>More transparent and responsive policies, procedures, and communications campaigns</p>



Engage Citizens

Citizens play an important role, as they often have information that government does not and many actions are *ipso facto* discretionary. Accordingly, governments can enlist the help of the population in stopping the spread of the virus through locally-appropriate measures. Where the informal sector is large, and where large segments of the population live in conditions in which spatial distancing is difficult, it may not be possible to “freeze” economic activity the way many wealthier countries have attempted. However, a range of less drastic measures to reduce the spread of the virus will still require cooperation and buy-in. These could include steps such as mandated wearing of masks; reducing the density of public markets by physically spacing out vendors, or staggering the days on which they are allowed to operate; conducting temperature-taking; encouraging the use of public hand-washing stations; limiting the number of taxis in operation at once, and the number of passengers they can take; and enforcing two meter-distancing in queues.

Acting in accordance with national security provisions and policies, informed by consultation with subnational government and community leaders, can improve compliance and sustainability.²⁸ Consultation may need to be carried out via phone, email, and/or online given spatial distancing restrictions. Then, heavy-duty communications campaigns can employ different methods as appropriate (e.g. social media, radio, TV, IVR/Robo calling, SMS, WhatsApp, AI chatbots, billboards, marketing, national info dashboards for quick reference) including multilingual outreach. In Rwanda, radio dramas are teaching about handwashing²⁹; in Nigeria, direct text-messaging and robocalls to citizens have reminded them to wash hands and stay at home. It may be effective to leverage experts and trusted community/national figures (such as religious leaders or celebrities) to reinforce key messages.

Citizen feedback can usefully inform emergency relief provision. Feedback can be collected via structured surveys or using existing citizen feedback collection mechanisms (phone-based or online).³⁰ Governments can repurpose social networking tools and open government platforms that are already in place and en-

28 Moore, W. Gyude. 2020. “Curfews are a safer plan than total lockdowns to slow COVID-19’s spread in informal economies.” Quartz Africa, April 11. <https://bit.ly/3o7yqqX>

29 BBC. 2020. “Coronavirus: Rwandan radio stars spread hygiene message.” April 16. <https://bbc.in/3oXjMSq>

30 The Overseas Development Institute is maintaining a live repository of resources for collecting primary data remotely in the Covid-19 environment, available here: <https://bit.ly/2X85jy2>.



courage creative hacking from the technology community. In 2015, researchers in Sierra Leone collected information on the outbreak’s socio-economic impact via mobile phone, leveraging the sample frame from an existing household survey.³¹

Collaborate with communities; foster inclusive decision-making	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Form local pandemic-response task forces with public, private, and civil society representatives to coordinate with central authorities and set local policies and regulations</p> <p>Identify local solutions that can be scaled up or supported; discuss and adapt specific measures for physical distancing with communities to build buy-in</p> <p>Coordinate with the private sector on expediting manufacturing of critical supplies, protecting food security, implementing physical distancing; subsidize costs and/or use legal measures to require cooperation</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	<p>Bottom-up, locally-driven solutions engage citizens and motivate voluntary cooperation</p> <p>All stakeholders are effectively engaged in a way that maximizes their contributions</p> <p>Initial development of citizen engagement assets</p>
Listen to citizens’ needs	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Conduct household surveys using sample frames and mechanisms that are part of existing research projects (while staying physically distant)</p> <p>Employ technology as appropriate to gather rapid, iterative feedback (online, via text or IVR, WhatsApp, SMS, or via mail or phone)</p> <p>Develop contact tracing apps and make them available for public use to encourage digital citizen-provided data in real time to track the in-country spread of the virus</p> <p>Encourage upward flow of information from communities to central authorities via regular reporting of health statistics and economic data; create management dashboards (online or offline) as official management and oversight tools</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	<p>Government can react to households’ most urgent needs in real time</p> <p>Development of technological infrastructure for more responsive engagement and communications (GovTech)</p>

³¹ Kastelic, Kristen Himelein; Mauro Testaverde, Abubakarr Turay, and Samuel Turay. 2015. *The socio-economic impacts of Ebola in Sierra Leone : results from a high frequency cell phone survey (round three) (English)*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. <https://bit.ly/39AqISY>



Issue a call to collective action

Good Practices/Advice	<p>Use locally-appropriate technology to reach out to citizens and explain why and how behavior change is essential; enlist their cooperation; tailor messages to specific groups, such as members of religious groups, about modifying the ways they observe traditional holidays/events</p> <p>Engage influential local leaders to amplify the message by providing training and asking them to make public statements on awareness and prevention</p> <p>Public figures lead by example, e.g. by wearing masks to show that it is an act of civic responsibility, or to talk about the virus to destigmatize it</p> <p>Consider ways to leverage civil society capacity, e.g. on contact tracing, communications, protecting vulnerable groups</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	<p>Citizens feel motivated to be part of a collective effort to protect their communities</p> <p>Initial development of more long term assets for citizen engagement</p>

Foster Cooperation

Social and economic disruption will put pressure on the need for rapid delivery of emergency food and income support and continuity of essential services. Minimal disruptions in delivery will allow people to pull back from their normal daily activities. Moreover, appeals to citizens for shared sacrifice can be backed by a reciprocal, credible government commitment to protecting the vulnerable and providing essential services, thus maintaining social cohesion. This could include benefits such as cash transfers, unemployment insurance, free testing and healthcare, paid sick leave, tax deferrals, take-home school meals, free utilities, etc., in addition to targeted support to the most vulnerable. Governments can leverage existing tools for government-to-people (G2P) transfers, such as India’s use of biometric IDs to distribute food subsidies and pensions, or fertilizer e-vouchers to farmers in Nigeria.³² In Tunisia, people aged 75+ can request home delivery of social assistance benefits via the post office, and can receive benefit payments via mobile phone. Other options to provide quick help to individuals include using schools as a way to channel relief to families; increasing internet access by waiving fees to telecom providers; waiving fees for public utilities; and halting evictions. Protection of essential services could include migrating government services online or creating “Citizen Service Centers ++” (offering “minimal contact” in-person options, as well as online services).

³² Gelb, Alan and Anit Mukherjee. 2020. “Can we use digital technology to cushion the pandemic’s blow—and in the longer run, deliver on the SDGs?” Center for Global Development (blog), March 31. <https://bit.ly/2X8Vzaz>



Building on policies to strengthen social connection (as discussed above), governments can map out a collective response to the crisis. Incentives for people to be part of the solution, for example, could include subsidies to scale up locally-grown approaches (such as contact-tracing apps or other innovations), if they are aligned with national policies. Direct appeals to citizens’ sense of civic responsibility, communicated appropriately, as well as collaborating with and empowering communities, may generate voluntary compliance and discourage free riders.

Pass emergency fiscal measures and programs	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Ensure rapid and transparent distribution of benefits (safety nets, cash transfers, food, etc.) to help address inequality in resources and vulnerability</p> <p>Use G2P transfer technology to deliver benefits quickly</p> <p>Communicate these measures widely and thoroughly to urban and rural communities through various methods local and national (online and offline)</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	Citizens are willing to change behavior for sake of the community, because they feel that their well-being is protected, and that they are not the only ones being asked to sacrifice--the burden is distributed
Ensure continuity of provision of essential goods and services	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Move services online (certain functions related to tax administration, immigration and customs, voting, and court procedures may be amendable to digitization) and/or implement spatial distancing in service delivery where possible</p> <p>Prioritize monitoring of service delivery so access/quality issues can be addressed quickly</p> <p>Create, implement, and monitor detailed plans for safety of public sector employees</p> <p>Engage SMEs in repurposing existing services to support the response</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	Government’s response to the crisis increases trust and cooperation
Create incentives for collective action and to minimize free rider problems	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Provide funding to scale up innovative non-government-led initiatives (e.g. apps for contact tracing) using virtual hackathons or competitions</p> <p>Collaborate with communities to decide on and enforce any coercive measures re: physical distancing and quarantines (e.g. fines)</p> <p>Empower local communities to decide and implement the local response as they see fit while adhering to specific principles and safety regulations</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	Voluntary cooperation increases due to the shared sense that “we’re all in it together” while respecting local ownership and local differences



Restart and Recovery

Countries will aim to enable a full resumption of economic activity while preventing subsequent waves of infection and mitigating the impact of the shock on individuals and the economy. Governments can embrace, create platforms for, and help to scale up tools that seem to be meeting a need. Efforts in this area can build on lessons from co-creation of public services, e.g. in Singapore as well as South Africa at the provincial level. As countries move into the Restart and Recovery phase and beyond, there will be a need to keep a sense of focus and urgency around containing the virus, as eradication at the national level is unlikely in the medium term. Encouraging continued vigilance is a significant challenge as quarantine fatigue sets in, the threat appears to recede, and people begin to revert to normal practices. Strategies include continuing robust and unrelenting nationally and subnationally coordinated communications on the risks and current status of the pandemic, issuing guidelines for safe provision of essential services, and making local governments accountable for service delivery and locally-appropriate communications strategies.

Facilitate Economic Recovery

Working collaboratively with community leaders, citizens, and other stakeholders, governments can co-create updated guidelines on economic and social activity. Facilitating small-scale economic activity will help the most hard-hit segments of the population to regain some control of their livelihoods. SMEs may in fact be more agile and adaptive than larger companies—for example, in some countries entrepreneurs have started making parts for ventilators using 3D printers, helping to fill gaps while major corporations have struggled to ramp up production. Governments can create opportunities for SMEs by removing legal restrictions and using them as official service delivery providers (including facilitating pro bono efforts) where appropriate. Governments can provide funding to scale up successful ideas, engage in public-private partnerships, create a business environment conducive to innovation, and strengthen safety nets and other programs to cushion the impact on those harmed.



Support recovery of jobs and businesses	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Subsidize a recovery based on green jobs and investment; take the opportunity to rethink basic modes of business (e.g. change transportation patterns, keeping air pollution below pre-crisis levels)</p> <p>Expand access to digital technology (reduce digital divide)</p> <p>Public-private partnerships, legal changes, and other measures to facilitate business recovery</p> <p>Review customs/border crossing restrictions in cooperation with neighboring countries</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	<p>Communities begin to emerge from the crisis cleaner and fairer than before; citizens adapt their livelihoods based on new opportunities and incentives</p> <p>Development of longer term GovTech infrastructure</p>

Prevent Resurgence of Virus

If countries return to business as usual prematurely, there is a high risk that new waves of infection will overwhelm them. Sustained trust and voluntary compliance can be encouraged by ensuring transparency, social protection, and access to healthcare. Building on the Response phase, governments can disseminate new guidelines to flatten the curve on secondary waves or ongoing ripples of infection and continue to protect high-risk populations while allowing economic activity to restart. Aggressive testing for the virus will continue to be critical and should even be expanded as schools and businesses reopen with contingency plans for localized or intermittent measures to tamp down new outbreaks. With the benefit of experience, governments can plan for increased complexity around the criteria and modalities for stay-at-home orders and self-quarantining, easing restrictions, and boosting efforts to make successful collective action more resilient by adjusting incentives.



Increase capacity of health response	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Prioritize health in the supplementary budget</p> <p>Increase availability of testing; implement contact tracing via low- or high-tech methods depending on context; implement mandatory quarantine for those who are sick or have potentially been exposed</p> <p>Sustain spatial distancing and other measures to extent feasible/appropriate; each country will have to decide on the appropriate mix of measures, which could include mandatory mask-wearing in public and restrictions on economic and social activities that involve groups of people</p> <p>Coordinate with international partners and share data to track outbreaks and protect supply chains—to include neighboring countries and other bilateral partners, plus regional/global institutions</p> <p>Invest in health data infrastructure, collection and management</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	<p>Citizens feel confident enough in public health measures to be able to slowly resume economic and social activity</p> <p>Development of longer-term response partnerships, international relationships and funding mechanisms</p>
Ensure transparency in service delivery	
Good Practices/Advice	<p>Make planning, implementation, and results data available in user friendly formats</p> <p>Make information widely available on where to access healthcare, clinic wait times, etc.; georeferencing is a necessity</p> <p>Communicate timely and accurate information on virus spread, recovery rates, etc.</p> <p>Communicate these efforts widely and thoroughly to urban and rural communities through various methods local and national (online and offline)</p>
Outputs/Outcomes	<p>Citizens can help monitor and provide feedback on service delivery, thus improving quality</p> <p>Development of longer-term Service Delivery data infrastructure</p>



Strengthen Cohesiveness and Cooperation

This is the time to build a social consensus around how to sustain vigilance against the virus while pivoting toward the future. Transparency will be essential in maintaining social cohesion as the population is increasingly vulnerable and large sums of money are being spent quickly, increasing the risk of corruption and fraud. Governments can leverage and institutionalize new tools, e.g. geolocation and social media apps to monitor quarantines, trace contacts, disseminate information, answer virus risk self-assessment questionnaires, and allow citizens to report (mis)information. However, policy questions around data privacy need to be resolved through public dialogue. Governments need to offer credible guarantees that data collection measures taken to contain the virus will not be misused for other purposes (no “function creep”³³).

Institutionalize crisis-response communication and data sharing measures appropriately for the long term

Good Practices/Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure transparency of budget/expenditure (e.g. a line item for COVID-19-related spending) Ensure open contracting (transparency in procurement) Address data privacy concerns via legal reform; phase out temporary measures, if any, that weakened privacy protections Expire civil liberty restrictions Ensure Supreme Audit Institutions audit and report on COVID-19
Outputs/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizen-state relationship is stronger and more trusting than pre-crisis level, creating a foundation for collective action to confront other threats Development of longer term COVID-19 exit strategy and resilience infrastructure



Reconstruction and Resilience

Actions taken under the first two focus areas should be in line with long-term strategic objectives for building resilient societies. Countries cannot afford to pursue only narrowly-defined pandemic preparedness objectives. To prevent and mitigate future pandemics as well as other crises, they will need to take a holistic view, looking for ways that solutions can address multiple problems, while making difficult tradeoffs. Key areas include strengthening health systems, increasing food and income security, and protecting the natural world.

Strengthen Crisis Response Capabilities

Successful crisis response mechanisms can be institutionalized at this stage, and long-term planning should be reviewed and revised in light of lessons learned.

This includes, but is not limited to, future pandemics—e.g. via generic rapid response mechanisms, data collection/analysis capabilities, redundancies in local supply chains, and channels to quickly deploy support to households. Such measures will help make institutions more adaptive and responsive, which will be critical to facing the looming and myriad challenges of the global environmental crisis (Box 3). While creative GovTech approaches can facilitate this work, hasty and indiscriminate use of technology can create more problems than it will solve. Governments must take great care not to exacerbate inequality in voice and access to services and possibly undermine mechanisms that are currently fit for purpose.



Box 3

The Need for Solutions that Solve Multiple Problems

The pandemic has laid bare the essential truth that human well-being is dependent on our relationship with the natural world, and our ability to design coordinated responses to collective action problems. As the co-chairs of the 2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services wrote in April 2020:

Rampant deforestation, uncontrolled expansion of agriculture, intensive farming, mining and infrastructure development, as well as the exploitation of wild species have created a ‘perfect storm’ for the spillover of diseases from wildlife to people... Future pandemics are likely to happen more frequently, spread more rapidly, have greater economic impact and kill more people if we are not extremely careful about the possible impacts of the choices we make today.³⁴

In short, the pandemic and the global environmental crisis have the same underlying causes. Moreover, the same vulnerabilities that have put people at higher risk in the pandemic—crowded, unsanitary housing conditions; lack of access to healthcare; insecure food supply chains and livelihoods—also make them more exposed to other crises, such as climate-driven disasters.

Governments are facing difficult choices about how to reorient public budgets for long term resilience. The level of financial resources and political will being mobilized now may not be available again for a long time, so it is vital to make far-sighted decisions. Designing policies that take into account the broader requirements for a sustainable, low-carbon society will be far less expensive in the long term than defining today’s problem narrowly. Even as the COVID-19 pandemic has raged, locust swarms have threatened the food security of millions in East Africa, and a major cyclone hit Fiji, underscoring the need for solutions

34 Settele, Josef, Sandra Díaz, Eduardo Brondizio, and Peter Daszak. 2020. “COVID-19 Stimulus Measures. Must Save Lives, Protect Livelihoods, and Safeguard Nature to Reduce the Risk of Future Pandemics.” IPBES Expert Guest Article, April 27. <https://ipbes.net/covid19stimulus>



that address multiple problems. These could include, for example, data collection systems and cash-transfer programs that can be easily adapted to serve various needs, and job-creation programs and investments that support green objectives. Well-developed capital markets can attract investments that can help us reach a more sustainable and equitable future if combined with the ethos of environment, social and governance (ESG) investing.³⁵ Per Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the IMF, “as economies stabilize, we have the chance to reorient them to prioritize sustainability and resilience alongside efficiency and profitability.”³⁶

Like the pandemic, the global environmental crisis is an example of a collective action problem where individual costs to behavior change are concentrated and social benefits are dispersed. As with the short-term pandemic response, governments need durable policies to incentivize environmental action for the common good. If they are able to build a reservoir of trust and sense of common purpose in the response to COVID-19, this will be a key asset in pivoting to build a political consensus around addressing these other looming challenges. In the wake of COVID-19, governments have a unique window of opportunity to make the case to their constituents that the same urgent and coordinated action that was demonstrated to fight the pandemic is needed for the greening of supply chains, landscape restoration, and innovations toward a circular economy. Such steps can be incentivized through a combination of carrots (e.g. subsidies for green job creation, research, and training programs; fiscal incentives for sustainable corporate and household behavior) and sticks (new regulations).

35 Srinivasan, Kesavan and Srinivas Gurazada. 2020. “Investing in a more sustainable world during COVID-19 recovery.” World Bank (blog), June 24. <https://bit.ly/2CQoTZG>

36 Georgieva, Kristalina. 2020. “Beyond the Crisis.” *Finance and Development*, June 2020, Vo. 7, No. 2. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. <https://bit.ly/3oVleDK>



Investments that promote gender equality will be key to building more resilient, cohesive societies, along with improving safety nets, reducing inequality, and creating jobs via sustainable approaches. Pandemics have a highly gendered impact with women more likely to experience adverse economic and educational outcomes; frontline healthcare workers are also disproportionately female³⁷. These inequities undermine a society’s ability to cope with shocks. Moreover, special attention is needed to protect the most vulnerable groups, including IDP and refugee populations and the rural poor.

Expand and institutionalize mechanisms for crisis response.	
Good Practices/Advice	Review and revise pre-existing crisis management strategies and legal policies/ frameworks based on evaluation of the pandemic response Improve generic rapid response mechanisms, data collection/analysis capabilities, IT security, redundancies in local supply chains, ability to deploy resources quickly Institutionalize pandemic response task force, strengthen planning capability Review lessons learned in other countries and adapt for local context
Outputs/Outcomes	Government is better positioned to respond proactively to new threats and shocks, thus maintaining citizens’ trust Establishment of a reliable GovTech service response infrastructure
Invest in gender equality, strengthen safety nets and protect the most vulnerable, including IDP/ refugee populations and marginalized groups	
Good Practices/Advice	Reduce gender inequality by investing in healthcare, education, legal reform, economic opportunity Improve housing safety, strengthen mechanisms for delivery of benefits, strengthen food supply chains, subsidize job creation
Outputs/Outcomes	Women are better positioned to protect their own and their families’ health and safety in future crises, and are empowered to play a larger role in decision making Cooperation increases, as inequality and vulnerability decline Better development outcomes

³⁷ Evans, David. 2020. “How will COVID-19 affect women and girls in low- and middle-income countries?” Center for Global Development (blog), March 16. <https://bit.ly/39KledK>



Maintain Citizen Engagement and Incentivize Collective Action

In the Reconstruction and Resilience phase, governments can continue to strengthen the citizen-state relationship. This means institutionalizing transparency measures, reorienting public budgets, improving two-way communication, and demonstrating government responsiveness by improving service delivery. Empowering communities and subnational governments to find and deploy local solutions will lay the groundwork for a more successful response to the next crisis. Protecting civic space and media freedom and retiring restrictions on civil liberties will be key to sustaining trust.

Reorient public budgets to increase resilience and improve service delivery	
Good Practices/Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subnational/community oriented participatory budgeting, community service quality monitoring, and other measures to empower citizens in the budget process Foster two-way communication and respond to citizen feedback re: service delivery to improve government responsiveness and fix rate Strengthen fiduciary oversight and reporting; implement paperless processes to improve transparency Emphasize the subnational as a matter of priority Enact policy and legislation to ensure these activities are enforced
Outputs/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public spending is reoriented in a way that reflects citizens’ priorities and helps prevent/mitigate future crises Communities and community leadership are empowered to self-direct
Protect civic space and strengthen citizens’ voice	
Good Practices/Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enforce legal protections of freedom of expression and media and civil liberties Use technology judiciously to amplify citizen voice (create feedback loops) Support civil society organizations in their efforts to hold government accountable for delivering public services and expanding safety nets, healthcare coverage Expire civil liberty restrictions; review and reform existing policies
Outputs/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trust grows as citizens’ rights are protected and civil society holds government accountable Open government and freedom of information enable governments to make better decisions and respond more effectively to future crises A constructive/non-adversarial relationship with civil society



Conclusion

An effective pandemic response will be based on a “best fit” approach that creates a resilient and prepared state that aids in economic recovery. This paper argued that a state that is better at listening, adapting, and responding has more tools at its disposal to be successful in implementing spatial distancing and other short- and long-term measures. Building institutional trust and fostering cooperation through social connection will significantly advance these efforts. Ultimately the goal is to be better equipped against health shocks as well as other crises, and to establish a better approach to connecting with citizens on service quality based on a two-way dialogue.

In this unprecedented and rapidly evolving global crisis there are many unanswered questions, and the “lessons learned” are in flux. Scientists’ understanding of the virus has increased dramatically in just a few months, but many fundamental questions remain, such as the degree of immunity conferred by a COVID-19 recovery, and the reasons for the virus’s differential impact on youth vs. the elderly. These and other unknowns have dramatic implications for policy making, meaning that to a significant extent policy makers are operating in the dark. It is likely to be easier for governments to make course corrections as needed if they have been collaborative and transparent in their decision making, and if they have invested in social cohesion for the uncertain times ahead.

The pandemic has underscored the need for resolving the collective action problem, as well as the importance of effective and accountable governance within countries and international cooperation among them. If governments fail to incentivize solutions needed to tackle ongoing and emerging crises, the pandemic could lead individuals to conclude that their institutions have failed them and that collective action is fruitless. Seizing this moment to build a new political, economic, and social order based on trust and a sense of common purpose would vastly increase the likelihood that countries can tackle their other problems.



Coming Together While Staying Apart

Facilitating Collective Action through Trust and Social Connection in the Age of COVID-19