



News

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Executive Update: What will the world look like after COVID-19?

New York, United States of America

The following is an article by [Lise Kingo](#), CEO & Executive Director, United Nations Global Compact, originally posted on [GreenBiz](#) on 10 April 2020.

Living through these unusual and difficult times invites serious reflection on important and existential questions. We are all asking the same core questions: how will we get through this, and what will the world look like after COVID-19?

I can't help but think of COVID-19 as a fire drill for future global challenges. Will we be better prepared to respond to the climate emergency and other urgent sustainability challenges as a result of this experience? So far we have learned (whether we like it or not) that we are completely interconnected and interdependent – and that without solidarity, especially with the most vulnerable among us, we will all lose. No one has been left untouched by the pandemic during the last few weeks, and this illustrates in a very concrete and immediate way how global challenges such as climate change or gender inequality will hit us all even though they may seem less concrete or pressing in this moment.

The Danish Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once said, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." It is easier to understand what actually happened when enough time has passed to process the reality of how this pandemic has shaped our world. But we do not have that time now. We need to swiftly find a common understanding of the current situation and agree on how to take collective action today.

Below, I'm sharing my observations and inviting you to share yours as well. We need everyone to come together to think creatively about how to address the urgent problems on our doorstep while also planning to recover better and create a world after COVID-19 that is more inclusive and just.

First – let's take an optimistic perspective. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us an important lesson about ourselves as a human community: We are *interconnected with and interdependent on* each other in ways we did not fully understand before. My health and well-being are dependent on your health and well-being, and the same principle applies beyond borders and regions. Indeed our collective health defines the health of businesses and economies within and across nations. This new awareness has born a sense of solidarity and interdependency that I have found heartwarming. Clearly, we care about each other.

While many of us are working from home, many others still are continuing to go out into the world to perform essential jobs. From taking care of the sick to delivering mail and groceries, these workers are ensuring that our societies keep running during lockdown, putting themselves and their families at significant risk.

It has therefore been encouraging to see many people and organizations stepping up during these difficult times to support one another. Neighbours are looking out for each other while many businesses are looking out for their employees, suppliers and vendors. Some companies have even repurposed their production to deliver much-needed medical and protective equipment.

Governments, too, are taking important measures to prioritize the well-being of their citizens, committing significant economic relief packages and elevating healthcare efforts to protect people, especially vulnerable communities. Businesses are coordinating with local and national officials to support Government initiatives, and even finding ways to support society in those instances where Governments are failing to meet basic responsibilities to their citizens. The private sector has contributed record-breaking funds to address the humanitarian needs stemming from the pandemic. We can only beat back a global crisis such as COVID-19 if we band together and foster a multi-stakeholder approach.

But allow me to also take a moment to discuss the more concerning elements of tackling COVID-19. Because while we came together to support those in need within our own neighbourhoods and communities, COVID-19 also demonstrated how the most vulnerable groups are all too often forgotten and left behind to fend for themselves. Meanwhile, the ILO estimated that up to 25 million jobs worldwide could be lost as a result of the crisis, and since its first report on 18 March, lockdown measures taken to contain the spread of the disease has affected already around 2.7 billion workers, forcing millions into unemployment.

This unemployment crisis will hit women – who often hold vulnerable and precarious jobs – the hardest. Women were among the first to lose out during the economic shock of COVID-19. When nations across the world implemented stay-at-home measures, the challenges faced by marginalized women became even more hidden away. Women continue to be shouldered with extra domestic burdens, often as informal caregivers at the frontline of infection. The lockdown also significantly increases women's risk of domestic violence in the face of economic difficulties, loss of support systems and being confined to the home. If gender equality was but a distant vision before the pandemic, the plight of the world's poor women can no longer be ignored. We have a big and important task ahead of us to ensure women and girls are supported both during and after this crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic is sweeping the world in the same year that the United Nations is commemorating its 75th Anniversary. There is a lot of hope in that. It reminds us that we as a human community are able to lift ourselves up from our deepest and darkest hour to rebuild a new and better world on a set of shared values and principles. The United Nations was founded in the wake of two devastating World Wars with the understanding that to save future generations from the atrocities of war, nations must come together in multilateral cooperation to protect the dignity and worth of every human being. That vision is as relevant and important in the wake of this pandemic as it was then.

The UN Global Compact recently launched a [special appeal](#) "#UnitingBusiness to respond to COVID-19", calling on all companies to take collective action to stem the outbreak and stand together to facilitate a fast recovery through the implementation of our Ten Principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. We are also inviting our CEOs to share their advice and expertise on how to deal with the pandemic with the global business community by recording their own [video message](#) on our website.

The world after COVID-19 will be defined by the actions we take today. Let's work together in solidarity to ensure that no one is left behind in line with the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Global Goals.

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