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## CARE International Policy Brief

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A CLIMATE-RESILIENT, SUSTAINABLE AND JUST COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

COVID-19 represents one of the biggest disruptors to sustainable development, human rights and gender equality in our lifetimes. People who are the most vulnerable and marginalized, particularly women and girls both in developed and developing countries, are the hardest hit by both COVID-19 and climate change. COVID-19 recovery measures provide large potential for jointly tackling the coronavirus and climate crises, as evidenced from past stimulus packages.<sup>1</sup> The trillions of dollars mobilized in the next months must be spent in a way that protects and empowers the most vulnerable, responds to their needs, gives them a voice, builds resilience, and accelerates the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energies. If governments fail to make their economic stimulus gender responsive, sustainable and equitable, they will drive our planet much deeper into the existential economic, social and ecological turmoil caused by the climate crisis.

Women are disproportionately affected by the crisis due to their position on the margins of the economy, as nearly 60% of the world's workers make their livelihoods in the informal economy.<sup>2</sup> They also play an essential role in the response to the global pandemic, and innovating solutions for building a greener and more resilient post-COVID world. According to the OECD, women are at the forefront of the battle against the pandemic<sup>3</sup> as they make up almost 70% of the healthcare workforce, while being largely under-represented in leadership in the healthcare sector. The connection between the pandemic response and tackling the climate crisis has also been highlighted in a letter to G20 leaders communicated by over 350 organisations representing over 40 million health professionals and over 4,500 individual health professionals from 90 different countries.<sup>4</sup> Women and girls' rights, leadership and participation are critical for ensuring an effective, just and accountable COVID response, and for building a more resilient and inclusive post-COVID world.<sup>5</sup>

According to a new study, global carbon emissions are expected to decline by around 7.5% in 2020<sup>6</sup>, similar to what is required to achieve each year by 2030 to stay below 1.5°C of global warming based on UNEP forecasts<sup>7</sup>. However, emissions are likely to bounce back to higher levels if recovery packages do not actively promote the required transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

The recovery from and response to COVID-19 require halting the business as usual approach, and must create a radical shift of the dominant economic and social system towards a more just, resilient and sustainable society whereby the economic, health, social, and environmental crises are not addressed in silos but as one crisis. Policymakers worldwide are responsible for addressing immediate and basic humanitarian needs such as health, food security and nutrition, shelter, and protection and security. Decision makers also face a historic opportunity to leverage COVID-19 response measures to help reinvigorate international cooperation towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.<sup>8</sup>

This policy brief outlines key demands to a COVID-19 response in the context of the climate crisis and economic recession. CARE calls on world leaders who will be discussing and adopting strategies with long-lasting impacts in the coming weeks (G7 and G20 Heads of States' Summits, European Council, etc.) to make ambitious commitments, in particular in scaling up support to the most vulnerable countries. CARE continues to advocate for the essential role of multilateral cooperation, particularly in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to massively scale up ambition in mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, and support in the longer term. Every opportunity to increase climate ambition and mobilization in the next 18 months prior to the rescheduled COP26 must be taken advantage of.

Climate change threatens to push an additional 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030, eroding decades of progress in social and economic development. The humanitarian consequences of climate change will only escalate if global warming is not kept below 1.5°C, as committed by world leaders in the Paris Agreement in 2015. With the temperature increase

projected from current international climate ambition, areas where half of the world population are estimated to live in 2070 may become almost uninhabitable due to Sahara-like temperature levels.<sup>9</sup> Greenhouse gas emissions need to be at least halved by 2030 and rapidly decline thereafter to keep a chance of staying with the 1.5°C level.

## **WHAT DOES THE COVID-19 CRISIS MEAN IN THE LIGHT OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS?**

- » COVID-19 further impacts poor and marginalised people already facing the climate emergency, particularly women and girls. It limits livelihood and income opportunities, access to resources and critical services (including sexual and reproductive health & prevention and protection from gender-based violence), and exacerbates existing vulnerabilities.
- » Immediate threats are looming from extreme weather events (such as torrential rains, flooding, heatwaves, wildfires, typhoons and hurricanes) which will compound the COVID-induced vulnerabilities in the next months.<sup>10</sup> The disasters in Vanuatu/Fiji<sup>11</sup> and Cyclone Amphan in Bangladesh/India serve as recent examples.
- » COVID-19 recovery measures provide large potential for jointly tackling the coronavirus and climate crises, as evidenced from past stimulus packages.<sup>12</sup> The trillions of dollars expected to be mobilized in many economies in the next months must be spent in a way that protects and empowers the most vulnerable, responds to their needs, gives them a voice, builds resilience, and accelerates the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energies. If governments fail to make their economic stimulus

gender responsive, sustainable and equitable, they will drive our planet much deeper into the existential economic, social and ecological turmoil caused by the climate crisis. Sustainability checklists serve as practical guides to identifying appropriate measures.<sup>13</sup>

- » Structural racism and systemic inequities, including gender inequality, put people of color and the economically vulnerable at heightened risk in the face of both the climate and COVID-19 crises, a situation that we are already seeing unfold.<sup>14</sup>

**As part of its COVID-19 policy agenda, CARE calls on governments to elaborate, implement and fund better, greener and more inclusively response and recovery plans by applying the following overarching principles:**

- » **Aligning all economic stimulus with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.**
- » **Putting people's needs, voices and prospects at the center of all social and economic relief packages.**
- » **Harnessing the benefits of a zero-carbon, climate-resilient, inclusive, gender-just and sustainable post-COVID economy.**
- » **Upholding financial support commitments to developing countries towards these objectives.**



# Priorities for a resilient, sustainable and just COVID-19 response and recovery

CARE calls on governments and all other relevant actors for the following:

## 1 All efforts to address the crisis and support recovery must be community-driven, gender-transformative and lead to a fairer distribution of wealth across populations

People who are the most vulnerable and marginalized, particularly women and girls in developed and developing countries, are the hardest hit by both COVID-19 and climate change. COVID-19 recovery measures provide large potential for jointly tackling the coronavirus and climate crises, as evidenced from past stimulus packages, also with a view to reducing inequality and promoting women's leadership.

- » Recognize, fund and support local women's organizations as critical allies in efforts to reach the most affected and hardest-to-reach populations in recovery efforts. Challenge myths and misinformation and enable community-based surveillance and detection.
- » Ensure women and girls in conflict and fragile settings are able to safely and actively participate in the COVID-19 response without fear of repercussion. Promote women's leadership in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and humanitarian response and recovery efforts at all levels.
- » Make the economic response gender-transformative. Prioritize women in the response because they are essential agents of recovery and change; ensure women's voice, co-leadership and balanced representation in decision-making on economic and financial recovery; and include a gender lens into the analysis, progress tracking and data collection.
- » Scale up social protection, safety nets, and access to financial and other services that account for women's unequal caregiving burden. Take a gender-transformative approach to assistance modalities, including on development assistance, tax, concessional and non-concessional funding and debt relief. Accelerate ratification of the International Labour Organization Violence and Harassment Convention (C190) adopted in June 2019.
- » Design support and recovery packages in such ways that they are not disproportionately benefiting the already wealthy individuals, but contribute to a redistribution of wealth that leads to more equality within societies. Moreover, stimulus plans must incorporate measures to prevent staff dismissals and bonus systems.

## 2 Ensure recovery actions increase resilience to climate change and other stressors

Increasing resilience will be essential to better prepare for future crises both caused by climate change impacts as well as COVID-19-like pandemics. Current responses to COVID-19 should strive to address immediate impacts in a way that societies become more resilient to the next crisis or climate-related disaster. Multiple economic and societal synergies can be harnessed if the right measures are supported. Investments into climate adaptation in critical areas such as food, water, early-warning systems, and more also pay off economically over time, as the Global Commission on Adaptation demonstrated.<sup>15</sup>

- » One of the worst cascading effects of COVID-19, measures to contain it, and its economic impacts is expected to be a severe food crisis in developing countries; urgent action is needed to avoid the worst impacts. National governments, donor governments, and the international community must maintain support, including foreign assistance, to climate-resilient agricultural livelihoods, especially for small-scale farmers and women and continue investment to tackle malnutrition.
- » Measures should be prioritised which can simultaneously provide jobs and income for population segments particularly affected by COVID-19, and which address countries' climate resilience and mitigation priorities according to their national climate action plans known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- » In highly climate-vulnerable countries (such as small island States and Least Developed Countries) that are expected to face extreme weather events in the next months, investments into staff, technology, etc. must help secure the functioning of disaster preparedness and social protection mechanisms, such as early-warning systems and action forecast-based finance, to avoid the next extreme event from overwhelming COVID-19 affected communities.
- » Countries should start developing long-term strategic approaches and cooperation models for pandemic preparedness, including aspects of extreme weather events and climate shocks, also of transboundary nature, as COVID-19 is neither the first nor only time that our globalized society will face these types of compound risks. National Adaptation Plans can serve as a key starting point here.



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### 3 Accelerate the transformation to zero-emission economies

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*Before COVID-19, global efforts to reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions have been grossly insufficient for limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as envisaged in the Paris Agreement. Instead the world has been on track for a 3°C increase in global average temperature which would be expected to trigger irreversible adverse impacts, potentially threatening the very existence of human civilisations. As measures to tackle the climate crisis, such as renewable energies and reducing deforestation, show to have multiple societal health and economic benefits, economic responses to COVID-19 should focus on measures which can shift economies to climate-neutral pathways, aiming to reduce global emissions by 2030 by at least 50% compared to 2015 levels.*

- » Countries should boost investments into sustainable forms of renewable energies given their massive environmental, health and economic benefits. Specific programmes to promote renewable energy solutions in sectors and activities in which poor people and women make up most of the workforce, such as agriculture, health, local manufacturing, should be designed, with special attention to economically and socially empowering women.<sup>16</sup> Renewable energies can also directly support life-saving and resilience-building approaches such as early-warning systems and actions.<sup>17</sup>
- » Bailout and recovery funding must not support companies focused on the exploration and selling of fossil fuels. Instead, stimulus plans must focus on phasing out such activities through just transitions to renewable energy.
- » Support for companies, such as airlines, with large carbon footprints must be tied to clear environmental and social commitments and a “measurable plan of action to transition towards a net-zero emissions future”<sup>18</sup> (with rapid actual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030).
- » The COVID19 crisis has revealed just how broken our food systems are. All actors must commit to rebuilding food systems that are more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable. Agricultural investment should prioritize climate resilient approaches and ensure support reaches the most vulnerable, particularly small-scale and women farmers. Food systems actors and governments must act to ensure everyone can access healthy, sustainable diets.
- » New financial resources may be found to support the transition through kerosene taxation, flight taxes etc.
- » Governments must promote this transformation through revised inclusive national climate action plans (NDCs) and should pursue their fair contributions of at least halving global emissions by 2030.<sup>19</sup> The enhanced NDCs, to be submitted in 2020, can be the backbone to the implementation of actions in response to the impacts of COVID-19, guided by the globally adopted goals of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals.

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### 4 Uphold financial support commitments to developing countries towards these objectives

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*In such a global crisis, solidarity with more vulnerable countries and populations, and honoring support commitments and obligations, is more important than ever, as a global pandemic requires global cooperation.*

- » In the short term, the priority with partner countries must be to address the health crisis, immediate humanitarian and socio-economic impacts on livelihoods, and the right to food, in a gender-responsive manner. Donors should free up maximal emergency and concessional finance that doesn't exacerbate existing debt vulnerabilities, in the form of budget support and direct transfers to national response plans, support measures to tackle liquidity pressures, and debt relief. In the medium to long term, an economic crisis in the Global South could push hundreds of millions more into poverty.<sup>20</sup>
- » Alongside ambitious domestic recovery plans, international solidarity and support must be part of the response to the global crisis. Donor countries should not reduce their absolute levels of Official Development Aid (ODA) provided, aim to exceed their commitment to provide ODA of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI).
- » Developed countries should reiterate the commitment to provide USD 100bn per year by 2020 to support climate action in developing countries, through increasing new and additional climate finance for mitigation and adaptation (at least 50%), and for addressing loss and damage. They must not divert climate finance and not backtrack on commitments made for future finance (such as into the Green Climate Fund, or for raising climate finance after 2020), as this support will be critical for many developing countries. Highly-indebted and least developed countries should receive grant-based support. The strongest social, environmental, climate and human rights standards must apply to all financial support.
- » To fund the COVID-19 response in relation to climate change and key SDGs, new and innovative finance sources should be implemented which have the potential to generate truly additional resources (such as levies on air or maritime transport, fossil fuel extraction), linked for example to bail-out measures. Relatively small amounts per unit can generate billions of USD, varying by the type of the finance source.<sup>21</sup> International institutions, such as the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund or the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), stand ready to play a role channelling such resources to vulnerable and affected developing countries.

# Endnotes

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- 2 Gerdin, A. et al. (2020): Why protecting informal economy workers is so critical in time of COVID-19. <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2020/04/17/why-protecting-informal-economy-workers-is-so-critical-in-time-of-covid-19/>
- 3 OECD (2020): Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19. [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=127\\_127000-awfnqj80me&title=Women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-COVID-19-crisis](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=127_127000-awfnqj80me&title=Women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-COVID-19-crisis)
- 4 <https://healthyrecovery.net/>, 26 May 2020
- 5 Find more background on the gender and climate change link in CARE's campaign brief "SheLeadsInCrisis" <https://careclimatechange.org/sheleadsincrisis-campaign-brief/>
- 6 Le Quere, C. et al. (2020): Temporary reduction in daily global CO2 emissions during the COVID-19 forced confinement. Nature Climate Change. 19 May 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0797-x>
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- 8 UN (2020): Note to Correspondents: Letter from the Secretary-General to G-20 Members. 23 March 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/tjclpkw>
- 9 Xu, C. et al. (2020). Future of the human climate niche. PNAS May 26, 2020 117 (21) 11350-11355. <https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2020/04/28/1910114117>
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- 11 Marango, J. (2020): Please, for the Pacific, rebuild your economy greener after Covid-19. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/climate-news/121256438/opinion-please-for-the-pacific-rebuild-your-economy-greener-after-covid1>
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- 13 World Bank (2020): Proposed Sustainability Checklist for Assessing Economic Recovery Interventions April 2020. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/223671586803837686/Sustainability-Checklist-for-Assessing-Economic-Recovery-Investments-April-2020.pdf>
- 14 Philips, C.A. et al. (2020): Compound climate risks in the COVID-19 pandemic. Nature Climate Change. 15 May 2020. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-020-0804-2>
- 15 Global Commission on Adaptation (2019): Adapt now. A global call for leadership on adaptation and resilience. <https://gca.org/global-commission-on-adaptation/report>
- 16 IRENA (2019): Gender Equality for an inclusive energy transition. <https://www.irena.org/newsroom/articles/2019/Jan/Gender-equality-for-an-inclusive-energy-transition>
- 17 For an example from CARE's work in Niger, see e.g. <https://careclimatechange.org/case-studies-sun-powering-climate-adaptation/>
- 18 Hepburn, C. et al. (2020): Will COVID-19 fiscal recovery packages accelerate or retard progress on climate change? <https://www.smithschool.ox.ac.uk/publications/wpapers/workingpaper20-02.pdf>
- 19 Unfortunately, current NDCs from major economies are largely insufficient and put the world on +3°C pathways, see e.g. [www.climateactiontracker.org](http://www.climateactiontracker.org). NDCs must include the use of nature for both climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 20 See also joint NGO letter which CARE co-signed towards EU decision-makers: <http://www.caneurope.org/publications/letters-to-policy-makers/1915-european-green-deal-must-strengthen-partner-countries-recovery-from-the-covid-19-crisis>
- 21 Some of these have also been highlighted in a report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, David Boyd, these include an air travel/maritime transport levy, a tax on fossil fuel explorations (Climate Damages Tax), or the Financial Transaction Tax. See for example UN (2019): Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. <https://undocs.org/en/A/74/161>



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