



Interpeace

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION
FOR PEACEBUILDING

Peace and Conflict in a COVID-19 World

Implications for
International Responses

Briefing Paper

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About this Brief

This Brief summarises *Interpeace's* reflections on the peacebuilding implications of the COVID-19 crisis. It defines the outlines of the peacebuilding challenges and the implications for international actors and responders. The framing matters because our collective understanding of the kind of crisis we face will determine our responses both to COVID-19 at present as well as future crises.

While much remains uncertain, it is clear COVID-19 is both a multidimensional crisis and an opportunity for change. Addressing the multidimensional risks of the pandemic and the way they interact will be key to mitigating the overall impacts of the disease. Due to the conflict-inducing policy responses to COVID-19 that have emerged during the first half of 2020, the way in which peacebuilding approaches are integrated into national and international responses in future will be critical not only for the success of those responses, but also to understand whether they support peace or might exacerbate new or existing grievances already triggered by the pandemic.

This Brief summarises ten framing aspects of the COVID-19 crisis. It also offers three prescriptive implications for international actors responding to it.

The intended audience is practitioners and policymakers in the local and international peacebuilding, development and humanitarian fields as well as donors, researchers, scholars, and political and civil society actors.

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Next steps: *Interpeace* is developing recommendations and practical actions both for its own peacebuilding policy and programming and to inform the policy, programming and coordination of other international peacebuilding actors. These will be published in July 2020.

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken the world by surprise and has upended life as we know it. In a matter of weeks, billions of people have retreated – some voluntarily but many by force – behind their doors to practice self-isolation and “physical distancing.” However, billions more in poor neighbourhoods, camps for internally displaced persons and refugees, and communities affected by conflict cannot afford to do so. Living in a permanent state of precarity, their most basic daily survival needs for food, medicine or money outweigh the penalties of ignoring government restrictions on movement. Despite differences of circumstance, what they all share is a fear, not just of the virus, but of the uncertainty that it has introduced into their lives.

As of May 2020, we are only beginning to understand the science surrounding the virus, but the scale of the consequences unleashed by the pandemic is becoming clear. The virus is now growing at its fastest rate and thus the full impacts are still in the future. Deaths from COVID-19 are significant, even if estimates of the global toll significantly vary. More alarming are the outlines of what could be a greater death toll from the indirect consequences of the pandemic due to known risks such as economic collapse, acute food insecurity, and increased conflict and violence. This speaks nothing of the unknown risks. This tells us we must reframe our understanding of the COVID-19 crisis from solely a public health crisis to a multidimensional crisis with consequences that will far outlive the introduction of a vaccine.

Early in the crisis some referred to the pandemic as a “great equalizer,” but as the disease has evolved and spread, it increasingly is apparent that it is anything but equalizing. COVID-19 is exacerbating persistent political, social, and economic structural inequalities that render some groups more vulnerable than others. Consequently, in many contexts, it is reinforcing patterns of inequality and grievance that undermine trust and the social contract between individuals and communities with the states that represent, protect and govern them. Compounding this, the policy responses to deal with the crisis are, in many contexts, conflict-inducing. Thus, the question of how peacebuilding approaches are integrated into the multidimensional humanitarian and development actions of governments, INGOs and UN actors – or not – is not an abstract or theoretical question, but a critical operational imperative. This is relevant not just for peace, but for the outbreak of COVID-19 itself. The extent to which international humanitarian and development responses are conflict sensitive and peace responsive to the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 will be critical in determining how successfully those interventions contain the virus.

In the same way that the pandemic fuels the fault-lines of inequality and exclusion, it also has showcased the profound resourcefulness, creativity, capacities, cohesion, sources of resilience, and manner in which ordinary people and communities have responded. Long-term sustainable solutions to COVID-19 as well as future challenges and risks lie within these deeply embedded local capacities and ordinary responses of individuals, households, communities, and institutions.

Thus the COVID-19 crisis presents risks but also opportunity. It is asking fundamental questions of the social contract of societies around the world, and it is in the wake of the social dialogue and discord related to COVID-19 that profound peacebuilding opportunities to rethink social, economic and political priorities can emerge. The key question before us all – especially local and international actors working in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding – is how to leverage the opportunities for positive change and manage the risks?

An immediate problem, however, is how ill-equipped we are to address the first step of comprehending the scope and depth of the challenge. A multidimensional crisis calls for a multidimensional response. But as this crisis has revealed, the international community is not equipped with an adequate understanding of the nature,

pattern, or characteristics of risks that different communities face. Similarly, we have a poor understanding of the full array of capacities, skills, and attributes potentially available to build individual and community resilience to mitigate and transform those risks.

Much remains uncertain about both the causes and consequences of COVID-19, but it will certainly reshape society for many years to come. While the events of September 11th, 2001 irreversibly changed the world, there is reason to believe that the current pandemic's impacts will be even more far-reaching and multi-faceted. It will not only force upon us yet more profound changes to our daily interactions, our systems of governance, and our sense of human security, but also, hopefully, to our sense of solidarity towards one another.

The briefing note summarizes ten key intersecting aspects of the crisis that are important for peace and conflict dynamics and peacebuilding responses. At the core of the public health response there is (1) the direct peace and conflict impacts of the health response and (2) the 'infodemic' that cannot be separated from the technical parts of the health response. These need to be seen in context with the potentially larger indirect or 'downstream' impacts of COVID-19, which include the (3) economic impacts, (4) food security impacts, (5) gendered impacts, (6) impacts on youth, trust and the social contract, (7) the human rights, trust and security nexus, and (8) impacts on multilateralism. Two cross-cutting solutions start with (9) the need to consider and rethink risk and (10) the need for resilience approaches.

Five Key Messages:

- 1. This is not just a health crisis – it is a multidimensional crisis that threatens broader peace and stability.** COVID-19 threatens to stress and erode in particular the social contract between individuals and communities with the states that represent, govern and protect them. The phenomenon is world-wide, and is increasing the risk of violent conflict and instability. This is especially the case in developing and conflict-affected contexts where the indirect 'downstream' impacts on mortality and humanitarian needs because of COVID-19 may far exceed the immediate impact of the virus itself. There is a clear risk the crisis is narrowly interpreted by governments, donors and practitioners as solely a public health crisis requiring technical, health-centered responses. While public health responses are evidently central to the immediate exigencies of the crisis, depending on the context, the health needs created by the virus may quickly be overwhelmed by other needs and social grievances.
- 2. Peacebuilding approaches need to be embedded into technical health responses as well as broader socio-economic responses to COVID-19.** This is key to both their technical effectiveness but also to mitigating potential broader conflict and ensuring security. The immediate and relevant lesson from the Ebola response in both West Africa and the DRC shows a failure to integrate conflict sensitivity into an epidemic response will undermine the effectiveness of a technical health intervention and increase violence. Peacebuilders are key actors to accompany larger development and humanitarian actors to scale these approaches up. This is aside from specific and relevant peacebuilding work that may work on sources of misinformation surrounding the pandemic and addressing lack of trust of health care providers through trusted local intermediaries.
- 3. The opportunity for transforming conflict dynamics and patterns of structural violence in this moment is significant and can be driven through operational peace responsive approaches.** The present and coming challenge to the social contract in many countries presents significant positive opportunity to transform conflict dynamics and patterns of structural violence in communities. Peacebuilders are not the only actors that can build peace in these transformative moments – local actors supported by international humanitarian and development actors bringing peace responsive approaches into their work can be key to mitigating risks and building more sustainable peace. This first requires conflict sensitive

and context specific approaches and then more intentional programmatic efforts that understand and then influence the peace and conflict dynamics of communities and countries.

- 4. More localized and resilience oriented international responses are needed in this moment.** International responses should be guided by a widely agreed understanding that the crisis is characterised by uncertainty, rapid pace of change, multidimensionality, complexity, and the fact it is a stress augments and not a one-off shock. This means we need more locally owned context specific and long-term thinking as well as learning-oriented approaches that enable quick adjustments to assumptions about uncertain environments. It is critical that international actors put context first when seeking to make change. This implies we need to instill resilience approaches that can properly account for positive local capacities, skills, and attributes that enable those communities to not just ‘bounce back’ but ‘build back better’ as rapidly as possible. This needs to be done across international and local levels of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding responses to COVID-19.
- 5. The above approaches – conflict sensitive and locally owned peace responsive peacebuilding approaches are highly cost-effective and sustainable.** There is already a pattern and future risk donors make constrained funding decisions based on a strategically narrow and siloed understanding of what is and isn’t critically ‘needed’ or relevant to COVID-19 response. Already, donors have made significant funding reallocations ‘toward COVID-19’ away from other more long-term oriented programming. Yet, such decisions are often made without clear context specific clarity over what the local needs related to COVID-19 actually are. Because much development and peacebuilding action is often interpreted as ‘long term’ it is often some of the first programming to be cut from development budgets. This trade-off between different budget silos of international action is often based on a false economy as it is well established effective programming that prevents conflict and effectively addressing grievances in non-violent ways is highly cost effective and presents significant value-for-money.

There are three more specific implications of the crisis for international humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding action.

1. Improve Monitoring and Action Towards Collective Resilience Approaches

- Urgently develop and deploy new and scaled-up mixed-method, contextually adapted and multidimensional analytical frameworks that improve our collective ability to monitor and program for transformative resilience. Use participatory and timely data to assess the progress of resilience and ability to attribute how international actions are contributing to it.
- Simultaneously start a global process to rethink the nature of risk and better understand the character, nature and interactivity of risks and adversities and their ultimate impact on human security and well-being.

2. Develop a Scaled-up Systemic Approach to Peace Responsiveness

- Radically scale-up implementation of peace responsive approaches that embed conflict sensitive, participatory, multidimensional, and intersectional ways of working into the programmatic and operational levels of humanitarian and development work.

3. Assert a New Focus on Long-Term Local Leadership

- Refocus and reallocate resources towards locally led approaches that have a resilience focus. Build long-term objectives into such responses so they are transformative and resilience-enhancing and so they complement existing systems, relationships, capacities, and processes.

Interpeace acknowledges that much has been written about this crisis to date and that it continues to be fast-evolving. For that reason, our own programmatic and policy adaptations to the crisis will remain responsive and open to review of our assumptions, understanding, and approaches.

Text Box. 1. Summary – Ten intersecting aspects of the COVID-19 crisis that are important for understanding peace and conflict dynamics, and for formulating peacebuilding responses.

1. Peace and Conflict Impacts of the Health Response

- Much is still unknown about the virus and how it will continue to spread.
- It is critically important to embed trust in health responses.
- Lack of health system capacity and the socio-economic costs of suppression measures is different in most conflict-affected and low-income parts of the world.
- The direct solutions and ameliorative public health approaches to COVID-19 have the potential to be highly conflict-inducing.

2. The ‘Infodemic’

- Information relevant to the health response is just as important as the technical aspect of the health response.
- People do not trust information *per se*. They trust sources of information.

3. Economic Impacts

- The macroeconomic impacts of the crisis are significant and still largely unpredictable.
- The negative impact on remittances is immediate, undermines fragile household livelihoods, and will be linked to large increases in extreme poverty.

4. Food Insecurity Impacts

- COVID-19 responses need to be informed by a deeper understanding of the underlying and existing drivers of mortality, particularly the measureable impact of food insecurity.
- The impacts on lives lost from food insecurity could exceed the ‘best-case scenario’ of COVID-19 deaths.

5. Gendered Impacts

- COVID-19 will directly and indirectly impact men and women differently.

- There are gender dimensions to the security implications of COVID-19 – there are and will be impacts on levels of domestic violence, child abuse, and intimate partner violence.
- The livelihood impacts of COVID-19 are also gendered and potentially long term.

6. Youth, Trust, and the State

- This crisis is likely to have a lasting effect on the relationships between citizens and the state, with an intergenerational impact.
- The livelihood impacts on youth are both immediate and long term.

7. Human Rights, Trust and Security Nexus

- The impacts on human rights are multidimensional and should be seen through a prevention lens.
- For many governments, COVID-19 has been an opportunistic moment for curtailing fundamental rights and repressing social movements and opposition groups.
- There are several arenas in which tensions over the suspension of rights, norms and standards feed directly into the conflict dynamics associated with the COVID-19 crisis.
- COVID-19 policy responses require changes to traditional roles of security actors, which raises the threat of increased state-sponsored violence.

8. Impacts on Multilateralism

- The way in which the causes and solutions to COVID-19 are understood will determine the direction of trends in multilateralism.
- Unavoidably, a global pandemic calls for a global response.

9. Considering and Rethinking Risk

- Other existential risks have not gone away.
- COVID-19 requires reconsideration of the way in which risk is understood.

10. Need for Resilience Approaches

- Resilience is more than simply ‘bouncing back’. It is ‘building back better’.
- There is a need to move beyond palliative, survivalist, or remedial forms of resilience towards transformative resilience, prioritising existing capacities, attributes and resources.
- It is important to consider both negative and positive forms of resilience.

I. COVID-19 is a multidimensional crisis for Peace

The COVID-19 pandemic is transforming into a multidimensional crisis that threatens to stress and erode in particular the social contract between individuals and communities with the states that represent, govern and protect them. The phenomenon is world-wide, and is increasing the risk of violent conflict and instability. This is especially the case in developing and conflict-affected contexts where the indirect ‘downstream’ impacts on mortality and humanitarian needs because of COVID-19 may far exceed the immediate impact of the virus itself.

Despite the initial promise of the United Nations Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire, it is increasingly apparent that the pandemic will generate new or exacerbate several existing conflicts. According to ACLED data, of the 43 countries recording significant levels of organized violence, only ten saw actors that ‘welcomed’ the ceasefire call, while 31 ignored the call. In early May 2020, the ceasefire has stuck in some places, but in other contexts – Yemen, Colombia, and the Philippines – initial ceasefires quickly dissolved. In Libya, Somalia, Iraq, Cameroon, Mozambique, and elsewhere, there has been an intensification of violence both related and unrelated to the global crisis.¹

At the local and sub-national level, COVID-19 is already stressing weak systems of governance and livelihoods. It threatens to fuel social division, hate speech, jingoistic nationalism, group grievances, migration, inequalities, corruption, and structural macroeconomic fragilities. Further, the spectre of increased urban and interpersonal violence is not only concerning in its own right, but also threatens to undermine public health efforts intended to mitigate the virus. It is also hampering humanitarian responses and threatening international peace and security by stressing existing geo-political tensions, especially between the major powers, as well as multilateral structures.

The virus may not discriminate, but humanity does. The crisis has both revealed new inequities and exacerbated existing structural fault lines and forms of exclusion in our societies that render us weak and uncoordinated, and impair our ability to adapt to meet the challenge. High levels of polarisation, xenophobia, abusive security institutions, and deficits of trust in politicians and political institutions render evident the extent of structural violence in societies. These social divides will not go away when the solution in the form of a vaccine is discovered. Indeed, a vaccine, or other therapeutic solutions may further fuel them.

Conflict and violence are the single biggest impediments to development and to the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If tensions over scarce food, a breakdown in civic trust, or rumours about the virus fuel inter-ethnic violence, the core efforts to stem the spread of the virus will be undermined, and progress towards the SDGs will be reversed.

¹ Adam Miller, 'Call Unanswered: A Review of Responses to the UN Appeal for a Global Ceasefire | ACLED' (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 2020) <<https://acleddata.com/2020/05/13/call-unanswered-un-appeal/>> accessed 25 May 2020.

This not only calls for parallel and continued investment in peacebuilding efforts and approaches as prevention, but also requires the response efforts in all sectors to go beyond being ‘conflict sensitive’ and to become more proactively and systemically ‘peace responsive’.²

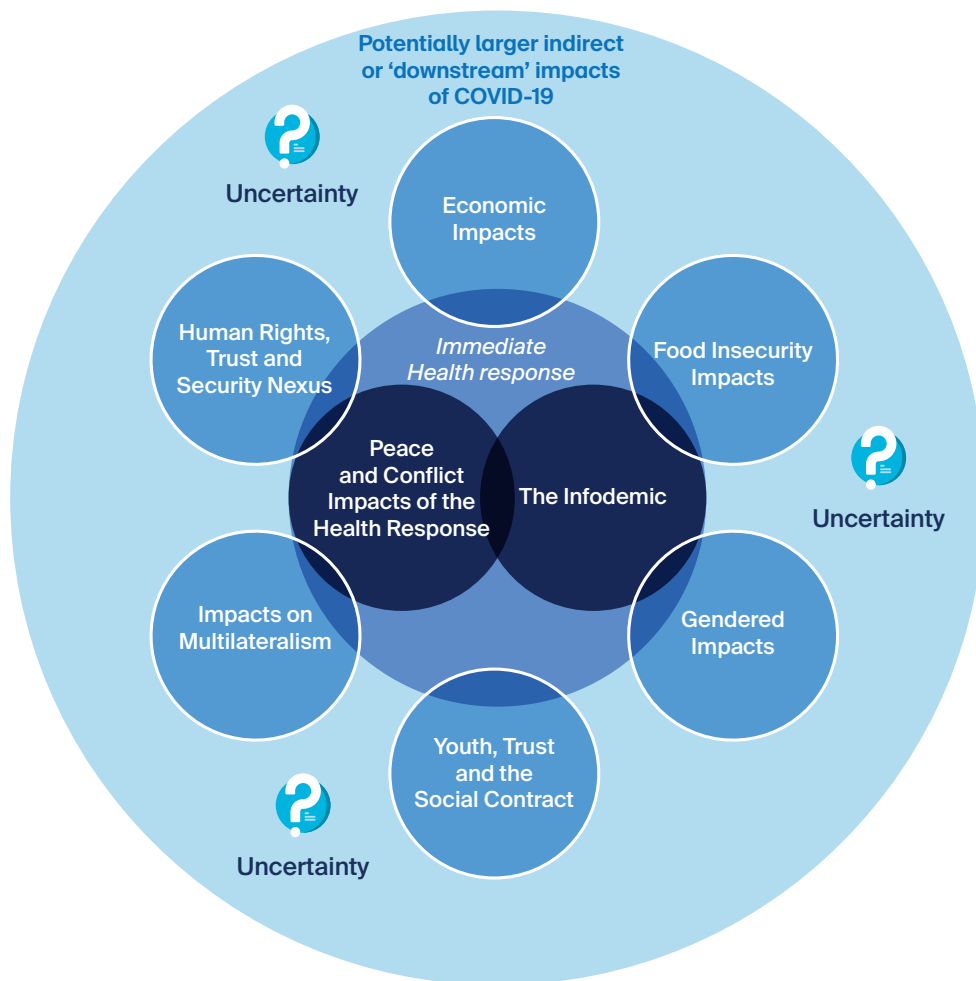
Addressing the multidimensional risks of COVID-19 and the way they interact, especially the impact on the social contract of individuals and communities with the states that govern them, will be especially important to mitigating the overall impact of the pandemic. For international and national actors that do not instil this fundamental understanding into their approaches, there is a risk that the crisis becomes instead narrowly interpreted as a public health one alone requiring technical, health-centred responses. While public health responses are evidently central to the immediate exigencies of the crisis, depending on the context, the health needs created by the virus could be quickly overwhelmed by other needs and social grievances.

This is why understanding the COVID-19 crisis in all of its complexity matters. It would be a mistake to interpret this crisis narrowly as a health catastrophe with secondary consequences. The international community has fallen into this trap before, and very recently. In designing the response to an Ebola outbreak in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2018/2019, international actors quickly framed it for what it superficially appeared to be: a health crisis in a conflict zone. Rather, what it came to be properly understood as in DRC was a pre-existing and multi-layered conflict situation in which Ebola became an additional stressor. The failure to not put the **context at the fore** undermined the efficacy of the international response in its first six to nine months, resulting in the tragic loss of Congolese life and international medical workers alike, the burning of health clinics and other infrastructure, and the wasting of precious resources. The conflict and context insensitive approach in its early stages thus further entrenched the underlying mistrust that communities harboured for the government and international aid institutions.

² Interpeace defines peace responsiveness as a practical approach that advocates for organizations operating in conflict-affected or fragile contexts to deliberately design for and realize peace outcomes through their technical programming – whichever sector it may be focused on. It aims to advance the practice of conflict sensitivity beyond reactive and palliative towards more intentional efforts to put the peace and conflict dynamics at the fore of action and build peace.

Figure 1 shows a visual representation of the peace-related impacts of the COVID-19 multidimensional crisis. The center red Venn diagram circles show the peace-related health aspects of the crisis, but these need to be seen in context with the potentially larger indirect or 'downstream' impacts of COVID-19, alongside significant unknown uncertainty.

Figure 1. Visualisation of the Multidimensional Direct and Indirect Peace-Related Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis



Key direct health dimensions of the crisis

- Key in direct "downstream" dimensions of the crisis
- Hyper context specific uncertain impacts
- ?

1. Peace and Conflict Impacts of the Health Response

Much is still unknown about the virus and how it will continue to spread as well as the impacts it will cause in the longer term. The greatest common scientific endeavour in human history is currently deployed to study the virus and to find a vaccine. Having rapidly mapped the genome of the virus, scientists are still uncovering new information about its impacts on the human body and across different demographics, its modes of transmission, and how it mutates. Despite all this, and while we are quickly learning, there is still much unknown about the complex science of how COVID-19 interacts with different populations. Will it be seasonal? Can someone who has contracted the virus and recovered become infected again? How will the virus spread in different climates? How does it interact with other illness like malaria, HIV, diabetes, etc.? The answers to these questions will be important for determining the spread of the virus and its impact on peace and conflict dynamics in different places. While understanding the interaction between access to treatment, facilities and technology is crucial to data-driven assessments of the disease, this is simply not possible in many conflict-affected settings. These problems of knowledge and data regarding the disease are one insight into the local and global fissures along which the virus and responses to it play out.

The importance of embedding trust in health responses. Trust is rooted simultaneously in the issues of legitimacy, accountability, and equity or fairness on one hand, and in the quality of services on the other. This is as true of state health systems as it is of criminal justice systems. Lessons from Ebola epidemics in West Africa (2014-2016) and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2018 to present) show the consequences of failure to integrate trust into health responses. Outbreaks like Ebola in low capacity health systems can collapse local and national health services, displace limited resources, and change behaviour to such an extent that more people die of other preventable diseases, such as malaria and measles. Further, the strain on overburdened health care systems does not just enable other infectious diseases to spread but can also result in higher mortality or long-term severe consequences for ordinary and potentially treatable incidents. The way trust of health care providers and health care system capacities interact are critical to lowering overall mortality from avoidable illness, but this depends on an understanding of the equal importance of trust, community engagement, and communication within health responses *alongside* technical and resource components. Because the state is often the central provider of health care, and often distrusted in many conflict-affected settings, the integration of peace-building approaches into technical health responses in order to realise greater trust is important. If trust is not embedded into health responses, there is a significant risk of coercive measures that are poorly understood or delivered with little sensitivity to local customs and needs resulting in social unrest in turn which can undermine the effectiveness of the technical health response and spread the epidemic further.

Lack of health system capacity and the socio-economic costs of suppression measures are different in most conflict-affected and low-income parts of the world. As countries grapple with containing the spread of the virus, many have employed lockdowns and social distancing suppression measures. In many settings, social distancing is a privilege, but for most people in informal settlements or for those whose subsistence relies on daily labouring, it is nearly impossible. While 'flattening the curve' is a helpful meme from epidemiology to understand the rationale for slowing the virus' spread so that fewer people need to seek treatment at a given time in order to prevent health system overload, it does not capture the full human security dimensions and consequences. In most conflict-affected and low-income countries, there is a dearth of health facilities and personnel. While harm reduction efforts against COVID-19 spread must of course be taken, flattening the curve with no consideration of the corollary socio-economic impacts is not a policy response that makes sense in such cases.

This reflects the reality that epidemiological models as they are currently conceptualised fail to contemplate how to 'flatten the curve' beyond the medical and public health consequences. A broader epidemiological equation needs to take account of the direct and indirect social and economic cost of social distancing measures

which may exceed even the very worst-case scenario of unmitigated spread from a health perspective. For this, new and more multidimensional impact models that take account of a broader suite of risk factors need to be developed, paying attention to peace and conflict dynamics. Meanwhile, it is also important for international actors looking to become more engaged to identify and understand local responses that involve effective context-appropriate solutions led by local communities which are likely to be more sustainable.

Direct solutions and ameliorative public health approaches to COVID-19 have the potential to be highly conflict-inducing. This manifests itself in at least two ways: (1) Suppression, physical distancing and quarantine require constraints on human freedoms and reduce collaborative, cohesion-building efforts. Because suppression is often enforced by governments, the inherent trust in the state, or lack thereof, can potentially trigger distrust, misunderstanding, and grievances that lead to violence. Combined with misinformation, rumour, and conspiracy, the potential for social unrest is increased, as has been seen in contexts that are as different as the United States and Somalia.³ More directly, grievances and conflict may be induced by the perception or the reality that these constraints may do as much – or more – harm than the reason for which they are being implemented, or via the perception that the constraints are either being unfairly or inequitably imposed, or have more prejudicial impacts on some than on others. (2) As has been seen in the case of Ebola, vaccines can be quickly politicised, unequally distributed, corruptly administered and subject to extensive misinformation. Responses to public health epidemics are hampered by the imperative to distance physically in order to limit spread. Yet this undermines the very human-centred and cooperative approaches needed to address the challenge.

2. The ‘Infodemic’

Information relevant to the health response is just as important as the technical aspect of the health response. The World Health Organization (WHO) has decried an ‘infodemic’ that is rendering more difficult the effort to tackle the pandemic. There is an overload of information that distracts attention from valuable and reliable information put out by national and international authorities. More dangerous than missed guidance and information is the viral misinformation that spreads quickly and perniciously on social media, by ‘radio trottoir’ (the rumour mill) and from political leaders. If not brought under control, such rumours, conspiracy, and misinformation risk fueling fear and violence, feeding off pre-existing xenophobia, mistrust, and suspicion. The connection between the technical aspects of the response that broadly address the quality and reliability of services provided is clearly and critically linked to the legitimacy and credibility of those delivering the services. Hence, trust of health services needs to be built on the trustworthiness of those services.

People do not trust information *per se*. They trust sources of information. Given widespread mistrust of various national authorities leading the response to the pandemic, especially in conflict-affected settings, controlling the impact of the ‘infodemic’ must begin at the local level. Identifying figures in every community in whom citizens trust and engaging them to be willing and able to support publicly the science and facts is a crucial contribution. Similarly, securing the support of youth influencers on social media is another vehicle for translating technical detail and messages into language that can change behaviour positively. Peacebuilding actors have learnt from previous responses to Ebola in West Africa and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo that, in those contexts, trusted *sources* of information (often priests, imams, chiefs, mayors, village heads, and leaders of womens and youth and other civil society organizations) are key and are often not the state. Rural-urban dynamics, inter-generational divides as well as ethnic or clan-based differences are invariably factors to consider when identifying and engaging these networks. An added aspect to acknowledge is how not just benevolent groups but also armed groups, gangs, cartels, separatists, or even corporations, who often have more control or traction than states in some areas, may also be more effective in delivering resources, (mis)

³ Subban Jama and Ayan Abdullahi, 'We are Used to a Virus Called Bombs' [2020] Foreign Policy <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/12/coronavirus-pandemic-somalia-al-shabab/>> accessed 25 May 2020.

information, and services, thereby winning trust in the areas in which they hold sway. These entities may be negative manifestations of resilience, and may represent ongoing challenges to effective peacebuilding and even reinforce conflict dynamics, but they may also play a positive role in addressing the information flow and other challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Economic Impacts

The macroeconomic impacts of the crisis are significant and still largely unpredictable. The global economy has suffered a shock unlike any other in modern economic history. Unemployment has spiked with nearly 200 million full-time workers expected to become unemployed,⁴ supply chains have been severely interrupted, global remittances have fallen by 20%⁵, and oil and commodity prices have collapsed. In the world's largest economy, 30 million or nearly 10% of all Americans became unemployed in a span of nine weeks. While economically damaging in the global North, the impact in the global South on countries such as Somalia that have suffered decades of war and that are forced to import most of their essential goods such as food, medicine, and fuel, could be catastrophic.⁶ There, sectors such as the khat trade which supports a dense network of self-employed individuals and small businesses has come to an almost complete halt, destroying already fragile livelihoods. Whether it is the primary mineral product dependent economies of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe or tourism dependent countries elsewhere, the downstream impacts on fragile government balance sheets and exacerbation of already significant debt burdens will be played out over the coming months and years, and will be unpredictable especially on economies that have a limited economic base.

The negative impact on remittances is immediate, undermines fragile household livelihoods, and will be linked to large increases in extreme poverty. The broader macro-fiscal impacts on trade, remittances, and supply chains will be particularly devastating for developing states. According to the World Bank, COVID-19 is expected to push 49 million people into extreme poverty, defined as those living on less than \$1.90 per day. This is closely connected to a forecast 20% drop in remittances which is a well-established key factor in alleviating poverty in developing settings. Given remittances in conflict-affected settings are at least two to three times larger than development aid and flow directly to individuals, the impact is already being felt. There are consequences for livelihood grievances leading to the exacerbation of other conflicts and broader social unrest and/or interpersonal violence, especially in urban settings.

4. Food Insecurity Impacts

COVID-19 responses to be informed by a deeper understanding of the underlying and existing drivers of mortality, particularly the measureable impact of food insecurity. Estimates of acute food hunger calculated by the Global Report on Food Crises by the World Food Programme (WFP) show the number of people suffering from acute food hunger will double in the next year to 265 million people, up from 135 million.⁷ According to

4 According to the ILO, 8 April 2020. Note, only a forecast for the next three months from April 2020. See: UN News, 'COVID-19: Impact Could Cause Equivalent of 195 Million Job Losses, Says ILO Chief' (2020) <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061322>> accessed 25 May 2020.

5 According to the World Bank, the 20% predicted fall in remittances is the sharpest in modern history. See: The World Bank, 'World Bank Predicts Sharpest Decline of Remittances in Recent History' (2020) <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history>> accessed 25 May 2020.

6 Puntland Development & Research Center (PDRC), 'The Existential Threat of COVID-19 in Somalia' (PDRC 2020) <<https://pdrcsomalia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/The-Existential-Threat-of-COVID-19-in-Somalia-Report.pdf>> accessed 25 May 2020.

7 Food Security Information Network (FSIN), 'Global Report on Food Crises 2020 (GRFC 2020)' (FSIN 2020) <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000114546/download/?_ga=2.90065563.1666343220.1590419946-1357817010.1590419946> accessed 25 May 2020.

the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), almost five million children under the age of five in developing states die of malnutrition-related causes every year. The World Food Program further estimates the number of people who will starve to death will also double.^{8,9} Given it is globally estimated that nine million people die of hunger each year, a potential doubling of this figure has the potential to far exceed the very worst-case scenario of mortality caused by the spread of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa. The nexus between food insecurity and conflict remains critical as over half of the acutely food insecure people in the world live in conflict-affected countries.

The above-mentioned data can be compared to the widely cited Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team epidemiological analysis which shows scenarios for lives lost from COVID-19 in 2020 at different regional levels.¹⁰ The modelling suggests that if COVID-19 spreads in unmitigated way (worst-case scenario) throughout sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that there will be 2.4 million deaths on the continent alone. This is compared to the best-case scenario which sees 298,000 lives lost. According to FAO data, sub-Saharan Africa accounts for at least 44% of the world's severely food insecure people.¹¹ While disaggregated starvation data by region are not readily available, a linear assumption based on the aforementioned numbers would attribute approximately four million deaths to hunger in Africa. **Therefore, based on the WFP projection on starvation deaths doubling, the impacts on lives lost from food insecurity exceed the best-case scenario of COVID-19 deaths by 13 times, and the worst-case scenario by 1.6 times in sub-Saharan Africa.** While these illustrative numbers are derived from basic descriptive data, they underline the need to contextualise other risks alongside COVID-19. But as the unpredictable forecasts of sophisticated epidemiological models have shown, the calculation of risk is highly fluid, and the emphasis should be on preparing for uncertainty and quickly adjusting to new realities.

5. Gendered Impacts

COVID-19 will directly and indirectly impact men and women differently. There are at least four gendered dimensions of concern related to the virus: health, education, economic conditions, and agency.¹² In terms of the direct exposure of health, the pandemic has significant repercussions for women due to their prevalence as front-line workers and caregivers, and indirectly because of the impacts on funding and availability of other health care services that women depend on such as sexual and reproductive health services. The downstream impacts on health services for women can be devastating in low capacity health systems. For example, during the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak,¹³ quarantine policies prevented pregnant women from accessing care, and women suspected of being infected were denied care, resulting in a 30% decrease in hospital and clinic births and

8 H.J. Mai, 'U.N. Warns Number of People Starving to Death Could Double Amid Pandemic' (NPR, 2020) <<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/05/850470436/u-n-warns-number-of-people-starving-to-death-could-double-amid-pandemic?t=1588881390346&t=1590420325392>> accessed 25 May 2020.

9 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Remarks by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock: Release of the Updated COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan' (United Nations 2020) <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Remarks%20by%20USG%20Mark%20Lowcock%20Release%20of%20the%20updated%20COVID-19%20Global%20Humanitarian%20Response%20Plan%207%20May%202020.pdf>> accessed 25 May 2020.

10 The early and evolving nature of various epidemiological analyses is evident when comparing to other sources. The IHME projections for North America as of 27 April showed deaths for North America (Canada and the US) flattening at approximately 71,000 (not including the error range of approx. 52,000 up to 132,000) compared to the most optimistic scenario in the Imperial college analysis at 92,000. As of 22 May, the projected deaths by 4 August was 143,000 (error range 115,000 to 207,000). See: IHME, 'COVID-19 Projections' (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2020) <<https://Covid19.healthdata.org/united-states-of-america>> accessed 25 May 2020.

11 Global Change Data Lab, 'Number of Severely Food Insecure People by Region' (Our World in Data, 2020) <<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/number-of-severely-food-insecure-people-by-region>> accessed 25 May 2020.

12 World Bank Group, 'Gender Dimensions of the COVID-19 Pandemic' (2020) <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/618731587147227244/pdf/Gender-Dimensions-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf>> accessed 25 May 2020.

13 Julia Smith, 'Overcoming The 'Tyranny of the Urgent': Integrating Gender into Disease Outbreak Preparedness and Response' (2019) 27:2, Gender & Development, 355-369, DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2019.1615288.

a 75% increase in maternal mortality. Inability to access basic health care services further disadvantages often marginalised groups, including women with fewer socio-economic resources.

The security implications of COVID-19 are gendered. Many countries have deployed militarized or securitized solutions to mitigate the spread of the virus with lockdowns and curfews resulting in different impacts on men and women. While available data is scarce, much criminological and public health literature suggests the lockdown conditions will, and already have, resulted in an increase in domestic violence, child abuse, and intimate partner violence.¹⁴ By way of another example, the political space in many contexts has reduced significantly, with human rights violations increasing and governments utilising the virus to restrict freedom of expression and movement. This can lead to men in particular being targeted because of their prevalence as actors and agents of protest and activism in the governance and civil society space.

The livelihood impacts of COVID-19 are also uniquely gendered and potentially long term. The economic and policy response impacts of COVID-19 have significant challenges for women with immediate impacts on livelihoods and potential long-term impacts on education. Different patterns of informal employment will have different impacts on men and women. Generally speaking, women are more exposed to the vagaries of informal employment in most low- and lower-middle income countries or are living in the most vulnerable situations. UN Women estimates that almost 90% of women employed in sub-Saharan Africa are employed through the informal sector, rising to as much as 95% in South Asia.¹⁵ This exacerbates the livelihood challenges women face, especially in situations where there is no social security or insurance. School closures also intensify heavy productive and reproductive workloads for both single and married mothers. Their vulnerabilities during crises are multi-faceted including increased care work while at home, school drop-outs, and risk of teenage pregnancies. Moreover, demonstrating how COVID-19 exacerbates existing inequities, the transition of schooling from in-person to on-line further disadvantages young women and girls due to the fact women on average globally are 26% less likely than men to have a smartphone.

6. Youth, Trust and the State

This crisis is likely to have a lasting effect on the relationships between citizens and the state, with an intergenerational impact. It has been acknowledged that direct and indirect responses to COVID-19 feed into and trigger pre-existing patterns of inequality and exclusion. Much of this will have gendered, intergenerational and intersectional manifestations that will echo existing experiences of structural 'violence of exclusion.'¹⁶ For many young people around the world, political exclusion, marginalisation, and powerlessness in the policy arenas that impact their lives is exacerbated by the responses to the virus. Hard security responses of states tend disproportionately to target and impact young people in the policing of the pandemic and often mirror the wider (and often self-fulfilling) 'policy panics' that associate young people with the threat of social disruption and violence. Furthermore, for many young people and particularly young men, they will be increasingly exposed to the criminal justice system and to disproportionate attention by state security forces through curfews, states of emergency, and enforced lockdowns. In the immediate wake of an era which saw the growing profile of youth-led social, issue-based, and protest movements, these civic spaces have been dramatically curtailed – not only through repressive state action, but through physical distancing, social isolation, school closures, and with them, many of the alternative avenues for youth-based political expression and organization.

14 Monica Adhiambo Onyango, 'Sexual and Gender-Based Violence During COVID-19: Lessons from Ebola' (The Conversation, 2020) <<https://theconversation.com/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-during-covid-19-lessons-from-ebola-137541>> accessed 25 May 2020.

15 UN Women, 'Women in Informal Economy' (UN Women, 2020) <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy>> accessed 25 May 2020.

16 Graeme Simpson, 'The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security' (UNFPA, PBSO 2020) <<https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf>> accessed 25 May 2020.

The livelihood impacts on youth is both immediate and long term. According to the International Labour Organization, past research on economic downturns shows youth are more affected negatively than older workers during recessions. Not only are youth more likely to be laid off from employment, but globally, three out of four young people work in the informal economy with no social protections or where tele-working is not an option.¹⁷ Precarious livelihoods may result in downstream security risks for young individuals; a significant rise in youth unemployment may also breathe life into illicit sub-economies. Longer-term, acute experiences of economic vulnerability, and a prevailing sense of a loss of an economic future or horizons of success, from the lack of access to decent jobs, and adjourned or lost educational opportunities, risk further entrenching a sense of social isolation and exclusion. The consequence of long and slow economic recoveries will translate into delayed processes and a suspended transition to adulthood experienced by many young men and women.

Opportunity for Transformative, Youth-Focused Resilience Approaches

The COVID-19 crisis has shown many extraordinary illustrations of innovation and resilience in the manner in which young women and men have responded to the crisis in their communities and societies. The description of these experiences and responses of young people emulate in many cases the reciprocal distrust experienced in relation to their communities and governments. Many of the strategies that are articulated as solutions in the United Nations' Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda – such as those concerning inclusion, investment in resilience, and partnerships – offer solutions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in both addressing the risks of conflict and in committing to the resilience and resourcefulness of young people.

While there is a clear risk of an increase in the structural violence of exclusion for young men and women and other marginalised groups, it is also true that there is an opportunity to be seized to support youth to play a role in a new COVID-affected world. In many contexts in Africa, innovative approaches are making young people a part of solution to COVID-19. For instance, young people have been at the forefront in countering misinformation in Côte d'Ivoire. Initiatives like the platform "La brigade de lutte contre les fake news," was created by a youth initiative to fight the spread of misinformation concerning COVID-19 and has decisively inspired a broader campaign by the Ministry of Youth. Students of *the National Institute for Arts and Cultural Action* (Institut National Supérieur des Arts et de l'Action Culturelle) have been prominent informers about health measures via short video clips directed to the broader public.

Elsewhere in Africa, mapping by ACCORD has shown an array of youth-driven technology innovation hubs that have been supporting local start-ups to develop effective solutions to address COVID-19. *CcHUB* in Nigeria, an open living lab and pre-incubation space, is providing financial, research, and design support for projects related to COVID-19. #DefyHateNow, a community organization based in South Sudan, with branches in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan, has initiated the #211CHECK collective, which is a digital community of youth working in various fields who collaborate to fight misinformation and raise awareness on coronavirus prevention and protection, using the #COVID19SS hashtag.¹⁸

17 International Labour Organization (ILO), 'Youth Hit Hard by COVID-19's Economic Fallout' <https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/multimedia/video/institutional-videos/WCMS_741948/lang--en/index.htm> accessed 25 May 2020.

18 Sibusisiwe Nkosi, 'Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on Young People' (ACCORD, 2020) <<https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/assessing-the-impact-of-Covid-19-on-young-people/>> accessed 25 May 2020.

7. Human Rights, Trust and Security Nexus

The impacts on human rights are multidimensional and should be seen through a prevention lens. At its heart, COVID-19 presents challenges to human rights both in the relationships between states and their citizens, and in the horizontal relationships between citizens and groups in affected societies. There is potential for emerging conflict on one hand, and of greater justice and human rights on the other. The pandemic and the specific risks associated with the transmission and contagion of the virus forces a constant, fraught and competing balance between rights and norms. The curtailment of civic and political rights, including rights of association, assembly, expression, and organization appear essential in attempts to regulate the spread of the virus through ‘social distancing.’

For many governments, COVID-19 has been an opportunistic moment for curtailing fundamental rights and repressing vibrant social movements and opposition groups. This is significant in a global context where burgeoning social movements were driving widespread protests in many countries and regions prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. Economic closure and downturn throw into stark relief the vulnerability of economically disempowered communities for whom social and cultural rights remain largely abstract or substantially irrelevant, especially for the wealthy. The pandemic thus highlights and exaggerates inequities in access to justice institutions, disproportionately impacts those who are incarcerated, and illustrates the gap between the ostensible commitment and reality of securing human rights that exists for vulnerable groups, including youth, women, the disabled, and forced migrants and refugees.

There are several arenas in which these tensions over the suspension of rights, norms and standards, feed directly into the conflict dynamics associated with the COVID-19 crisis. This includes battles over freedom of expression as opposed to the need to control viral misinformation. Limitations over freedom of movement ostensibly for the purpose of containing the spread of the disease have cemented anti-immigration populism in many contexts, tightened border controls, and emboldened regimes predisposed to violate the rights of their citizens through shutting down civic space. Furthermore, and more consequential for long-term peace, electoral politics is subject to manipulation and curtailment due to the pandemic. All these rights restraints and gaps in achieving rights disproportionately affect youth and women. This underpins the manner in which the full spectrum of fundamental human rights (across economic, social, cultural, and civil and political rights) are currently under threat in different contexts. Responses to COVID-19 are pitching civil and political rights against the right to life in ways that are not clearly understood, nor necessarily fair in the eyes of different cohorts of society. While conflicting trade-offs in rights are not new, they are arguably intensified amidst the pandemic and require greater social dialogue and mutual understanding than ever before. This dynamic places more urgency on the need for more integrated peacebuilding and rights-based programming that seeks to address the methods, priorities, and operational approaches of the human rights and peacebuilding fields.

COVID-19 policy responses call for unique changes to traditional roles of security actors threatening increased state-sponsored violence. Whether it is the armed services, UN peacekeeping, public law enforcement, border guards or custom authorities, or civil defense groups or private security providers, different security actors have assumed or been given some new and unfamiliar roles during the crisis.¹⁹ In contexts where authorities have or will declare states of emergency or martial law, the prevailing quality of security sector governance and the trust of the population in their various security providers will largely influence the levels of trust and/or conflict between the state and society. This is particularly acute in situations where there is already active conflict or where the levels of trust in security services is low. There is a vicious cycle to this dynamic as the traditional hallmarks of good security sector governance – transparency, responsiveness, participation, and effectiveness – are all to differing extents undermined by COVID-19. Examples of this can be seen from

¹⁹ Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), 'Impact of COVID-19 on Security Sector Governance' (DCAF 2020) <https://dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Covid19_BN_DCAF_0.pdf> accessed 25 May 2020.

the emerging response in Somalia and Kenya. In late April, riots broke out in Mogadishu in response to the fatal shooting of two innocent civilians by police as they tried to enforce a curfew.²⁰ According to Human Rights Watch, in Kenya, at least six people died from police violence during the first ten days of Kenya's dusk-to-dawn curfew where police reportedly shot and beat people at markets or returning home from work.

The Rights-Trust-Security Nexus triggered by COVID-19

In Kayes, Mali, anti-government riots occurred after an off-duty police officer killed a civilian in a period of heightened tensions, following protests against the results of the administrative elections, and tensions related to the implementation of the curfew as a preventative measure against COVID-19. For three days, riots against the police followed and two other people reportedly died during the rioting. Whilst the lack of trust between security forces and communities has long been an obstacle to peacebuilding in Mali, this is the first time that violence of this kind erupted in Kayes, a traditionally stable region and city. This demonstrates how measures taken against the spread of COVID-19, paired with other challenges including economic struggles – are catalysing latent conflicts to manifest themselves violently.

8. Impacts on Multilateralism

The ways the causes and solutions to COVID-19 are understood will determine the direction of trends in multilateralism. The crisis has highlighted the risks of highly connected global systems of trade, travel, and economies without adequate risk management and understanding in place. The dangerous assumption is to conflate the causes of the worldwide spread of the pandemic with current weaknesses in global systems of connectivity and collaboration in order to arrive at a conclusion that those global systems' existing weaknesses outweigh current or future potential benefit. Some may argue that this dangerous assumption is gaining attraction as political rhetoric in many countries has shifted towards national isolationism, shutting borders, breaks in international collaborations and growing geopolitical tensions. On the other hand, beyond the deteriorating relations of the major powers in the United Nations Security Council, there remains strong political will amongst most states that recognise the mutual benefit of continuing to invest in international multilateral institutions. A number of these countries have signalled their intention to strengthen key institutions such as the World Health Organization and other international responders to the pandemic. Leveraging this positive political will to strengthen and bring needed reform to various international institutions is an opportunity.

Unavoidably, a global pandemic calls for a global response. By definition, public health is a public good and public health emergency requires collective responses. In order to address the direct solutions to COVID-19, we need new levels of local, national, regional and global cooperation. The spread of COVID-19 in one part of the world can quickly resonate in other communities, regions, and countries, underlining the hyper-connectedness of today's globalised world. The virus, much like climate change, does not respect national borders. The development, production and distribution of a workable vaccine can only be achieved with international cooperation. Existing UN coordination mechanisms are already doing critical work, with little international recognition or fanfare. For instance, the UN's COVID-19 Supply Chain Task Force is building an emergency global supply chain system through which it expects to supply 30% of global needs for essential equipment.²¹ As these

²⁰ Jama, Abdullahi, 'We are Used to a Virus Called Bombs'.

²¹ Alex Evans and David Steven, 'Shooting the Rapids: COVID-19 and the Long Crisis of Globalisation', p.30 (Long Crisis Network 2020) <<https://www.longcrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-19-and-the-Long-Crisis-of-Globalisation-17May20.pdf>> accessed 25 May 2020.

institutions and structures are given time to function effectively at the global and multilateral level, it will be possible for them to demonstrate further the need for continued investment in them even if for no other reason than national self-interest.

9. Considering and Rethinking Risk

Other existential risks have not gone away. While the world remains preoccupied with the existential threat of COVID-19 and the threat of health epidemics more generally – other existential risks have not gone away. Whether it is the threat of a nuclear exchange, inequality and instability of capitalism, or climate change, or even more localised and downstream but nonetheless catastrophic risks such as bushfires, or locust swarms, these are additional and interconnected stressors to COVID-19. For instance, in the first half of 2020, in the Horn of Africa, climate change related locust swarms have interacted with the food insecurity and economic impacts of COVID-19 to compound conflict dynamics.²² By way of another example, the deteriorating relations between some of the world's major powers is increasing once again the probability of nuclear conflict, and in the event the START treaty is not extended by the end of 2020, the world will not have a bilateral nuclear arms control treaty that includes verification for the first time in 50 years.²³

COVID-19 enables us to rethink the way we understand risk. The striking way in which the humanitarian imperative to save lives has been implemented globally in response to COVID-19 provides an opportunity to rethink the nature of risks and what humanity should prioritise. While the concept of 'human security' is open to competing definitions, the normative rationale for reviving a concept that considers the integrated threats and risks to human well-being and survival is now critical.²⁴ To do this, international actors need to update their assumptions and understandings of different multiplicative or tail risk phenomena (of which violent conflict is one). The nature of global risks shows the danger of an increasingly connected and fast-changing world and yet also the contradictory need for increased cooperation. Understanding and aligning the community, subnational, regional, and global incentives for greater cooperation through a better understanding of human security risks presents a major opportunity to deal positively with the crisis but, more fundamentally, with future crises.

10. Need for Resilience Approaches

Resilience is more than simply 'bouncing back' – but 'building back better'. The common notion of resilience as "bouncing back" in response to external shocks or stressors is not particularly useful in addressing the impacts of COVID-19. This notion is not just limited because of its retrospective or remedial orientation, or because resilience should ultimately also be about the anticipation of new risks and more effective prevention – i.e forward – rather than backward-looking – as important as this is. The potential analytical mistake to be made related to the COVID-19 response is that only remedial and asset-related aspects of resilience is considered. By way of illustration, resilience to COVID-19 is not just about increasing supplies of personal protection equipment (PPE) but also about wider strengthening of social cohesion and individual household and communities' competencies to deal with the crisis. These larger and more transformative systemic and often informal aspects of resilience are particularly critical to not just deal with the health aspects of the COVID-19 crisis but

22 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 'Locust Swarms and Climate Change' (UNEP, 2020) <<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/locust-swarms-and-climate-change>> accessed 25 May 2020.

23 Tom Sauer and Ramesh Thakur, 'How Many Intensive Care Beds Will a Nuclear Weapon Explosion Require?' (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2020) <<https://thebulletin.org/2020/04/how-many-intensive-care-beds-will-a-nuclear-weapon-explosion-require/>> accessed 25 May 2020.

24 Kevin P. Clements, 'Confronting the Covid-19 Crisis: Danger and Opportunity' (Toda Peace Institute 2020) <https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-71_kevin-clements_director-statement-on-Covid-19.pdf> accessed 25 May 2020.

also other future risks. In a multidimensional risk environment where ongoing and cascading risks potentially increase in the speed with which they interact, resilience becomes more critical.

A more enduring problem is found in the narrow approach to resilience that originally emerged from the disaster recovery field, embedded in the idea that resilience was about restoration of the *status quo ante* (the situation that existed before), or about re-opening up societies and economies. A key finding from *Interpeace* research²⁵ has been that resilience in relation to violent conflict – or ‘resilience for peace’ – is premised on the understanding that conflict is neither linear, nor is its impact reversible. The option of a return to the *status quo ante* is neither possible nor desirable (since this would not presume to have addressed the underlying causes or structural underpinnings of the conflict). The preferred notion of “*building back better*,” reflects the key ingredient in the systemic thinking behind *Interpeace*’s resilience approach: resilient systems learn and adapt or transform in response to multivariate risks.

There is a need to move beyond palliative, survivalist, or remedial forms of resilience towards transformative resilience. A crisis which is treated as a purely health and medical phenomenon, and which is analysed exclusively by reference to public health epidemiological models, might unsurprisingly only seek solutions in remedial medical measures. This is also true if the economic impact of the crisis is evaluated exclusively as a consequence of the pandemic, rather than by reference to its myriad manifestations in the pre-existing patterns of inequality and exclusion that shape who is most impacted, and the resultant potential for future conflict. It will be important that peacebuilding, development and humanitarian approaches deployed to address COVID-19 over the longer term avoid the trap of only addressing the health crisis symptomatically rather than the structural underpinnings including of conflict exacerbated by the pandemic, while also seeking to harness and support existing resilience. To do this, conflict sensitive and peace responsive approaches that take a long-term approach are key.

We need to prioritise the identification of existing capacities, attributes, and resources for transformative resilience. The unique opportunity offered by the COVID-19 pandemic is to seek out and invest in the capacities, attributes, and resources for transformative resilience that are embedded in communities and societies dealing with this multidimensional crisis. This includes not only resilience that substitutes for absent states or medical service providers, or that ameliorates and survives the temporary pandemic, but also the manifestations of resilience which detect and engage the pre-existing fault-lines of inequality and exclusion along which the pandemic runs. Such an approach towards ‘transformative resilience’ seeks to address sources of risk through the attributes, resources, innovation and opportunities for peace at the individual, household, community, institutional, and societal levels.

It is important to consider both negative and positive forms of resilience. We know from other conflict-affected settings that resilience may manifest itself in either positive or negative forms, and that the latter may foster, rather than prevent, violence and conflict. It will be important to document and analyse these manifestations of resilience so that post-COVID-19 recovery can harness, sustain and invest in positive manifestations of resilience on one hand, while also inhibiting, neutralising, or co-opting the negative manifestations on the other. There are many examples of both positive and negative manifestations, but it may be worth identifying some of the latter, such as entrenched systems of corruption that trade on the crisis, the militarization of and repressive responses to the crisis that are increasingly difficult to reverse, the enduring traction of systems of misinformation, and the targeting or even ostracising of groups and individuals held responsible for the pandemic.

²⁵ Interpeace, 'Frameworks for Assessing Resilience (FAR)' (Interpeace) <<https://www.interpeace.org/programme/far-1/>> accessed 25 May 2020.

II. Wider Implications for International Responses

1. Improve Monitoring and Action Towards Collective Resilience Approaches

Scale up the collective ability to monitor and programme for transformative resilience. Transformative resilience requires a systemic understanding of what is positively functioning at various levels of society – individual, household, community, and institutional. The way various skills, assets, norms, and relationships work together systemically – or do not – will not only address the immediate spread or impact of COVID-19 but also deal with the various and intersecting risks. But in order to advance this, there is a need to scale up analytical and programmatic approaches as well as to improve our ability to define resilience-oriented solutions and monitor them tangibly. This is particularly critical given constrained resources and the concurrent expansion of basic needs; the existing capacities of communities and governments as well as other actors need to be more creatively leveraged collectively and strengthened.

Rethink the nature of risk and better understand the character, nature, and interactivity of risks and adversities. Global crises like COVID-19 are characterised by increased uncertainty, rapid change, hyper connectivity, and multidimensionality. This reality, combined with the fact that other existential risks have not gone away – such as climate change, geopolitical conflict and nuclear conflict – requires new approaches to understanding the risk environment along human security lines. Improving understanding of resilience beyond the ameliorative and programming for ‘building back better’ requires a deeper understanding of the functioning of social systems and adversities that different individuals, households, communities, and institutions face.

Better understanding systemic and collective impact is consistent with various international reform agendas and is overdue. The need to better measure, monitor, and programme for resilience has long been a much required normative shift in international humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding practice. Currently, it is a reality that despite the billions of dollars invested in humanitarian assistance, development and peacebuilding, international actors are often left with little true understanding of whether their collective actions have ‘added-up’ to a sustainable long-term development and peace trajectory. As a consequence, vast resources are either misallocated, wasted, or poorly sequenced to realise the impact that they otherwise could have made on building sustainable peace and development. Often, due to a lack of data and/or participatory field presence, international actors in both development and humanitarian fields have poor visibility of the actual needs and adversities of the people whom they are trying to help.

These fundamental facts are acknowledged to various degrees across the three large UN reform initiatives of the last four years – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), and the Sustaining Peace resolutions. Consistently, development, humanitarian and peacebuilding/peacemaking sectors are being asked to think more systemically, work in closer cooperation, address the real needs of people, and realise the critical interdependencies that exist between different pillars of action. Years on, what is clearly lacking in these multi-pronged approaches are workable empirical frameworks that can operationalise various principles and recommendations around collective action. By developing actionable

baseline data on resilience, it will be possible to better meet the multidimensional challenges of COVID-19 but also the risks of the future.

2. Develop a Scaled-up Systemic Approach to Peace Responsiveness

International actors need to adopt context sensitive and peace responsive approaches in order to be more effective and sustainable. COVID-19 interacts with pre-existing conflict dynamics and triggers multiple needs and potentially multiple grievances. The multidimensionality of COVID-19 reinforces the maxim that the needs of people living in situations of crisis or displacement do not fit neatly into the ‘development,’ ‘humanitarian,’ or ‘peacebuilding’ silos that have been created by the international community; they simply have needs that must be met, usually all at the same time. If international interventions do not put trust, peace and conflict dynamics at the forefront of their efforts, not only will the technical aspects of the COVID-19 response either not work or be ineffective, they will potentially exacerbate the grievances and inequities that threaten to trigger wider social discord and conflict. Ensuring conflict sensitivity and peace responsiveness in the COVID-19 interventions will help ensure the effectiveness of these interventions, mitigate risks of increasing conflict in light of the pandemic, as well as seize opportunities for laying the foundations and contributing to addressing pre-existing conflict dynamics.

Peace responsiveness is a practical and operational approach to implement multidimensional and intersectional ways of working. *Interpeace* defines ‘peace responsiveness’ as a practical approach that advocates for organizations operating in conflict-affected or fragile contexts to deliberately design for and realise peace outcomes through their technical programming in whichever sector it may be focused. Peace responsiveness is pro-active, forward leading and oriented towards systemic change in order to advance sustainable peace meaningfully. It aims to advance the practice of conflict sensitivity beyond reactive and palliative toward more intentional efforts to put the peace and conflict dynamics at the fore of action and build peace. Peace Responsiveness is thus a lens applied at the level of programme design and implementation in order to ensure that equal importance is placed on peace outcomes as on other technical programme outcomes. It ensures programme implementors ask the following question: How can a programme not only achieve its technical outcomes but, in doing so, also enable and create opportunities for peace?

Practically, this means asking how technical interventions can – or cannot – impact at least three dimensions. The three most pertinent axes in this regard are: (1) strengthening social cohesion between communities, (2) strengthening state-society relationships, and (3) inclusion. While there are noteworthy examples of how humanitarian assistance has contributed to peace along these axes, they are often not deliberately considered and designed into programming, which misses critical opportunities. Operationalising such contributions to peace is often intuitive for local actors and often only requires modest programmatic adaptations. It does require a reasonable understanding of the context, harnessing local know-how, and the commitment to go beyond addressing immediate short-term needs.

This is not about expanding peacebuilding as a field of action; Peace Responsiveness is not the same as peacebuilding. *Interpeace* has long understood peacebuilding as both a distinct set of activities with distinct objectives as well as an approach that can inform any international assistance activity in conflict-affected or fragile settings. Peacebuilding is often just one set of interventions amongst many others that contribute to peace. What makes more peaceful and resilient societies possible, is the aggregation of the peace impacts created through multiple peace responsive technical interventions potentially alongside dedicated peacebuilding interventions. Hence, what constitutes peace and what can lead to greater peace in a given context becomes the starting point for designing any intervention, rather than the starting point being a pre-defined intervention, driven by an organization’s mandate.

Interpeace is working with various United Nations agencies to mainstream and embed peace responsive approaches at the level of country teams, regional offices and headquarters, at different levels of management, and in Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks to change the incentives for this type of work. Where international actors and UN agencies are not able to adopt peace responsive approaches fully, they should adopt new partnerships and modes of working with local actors which can. Donors have an important role to play to incentivise more peace responsive action through using more sophisticated collective impact metrics.

3. Assert New Focus on Long-Term Oriented Local Leadership

Refocus and reallocate resources towards locally led approaches that have a resilience focus. In doing so, it is critical to learn from the mistake of the short- and long-term trade-offs characterising so many humanitarian and disaster responses of the past. To avoid this, it is critical to build long-term objectives into such responses, so that they are transformative and resilience-enhancing, and so that they complement existing systems, relationships, capacities, and processes. The incentives to drive long-term behaviour should be driven by new participatory and timely collective impact metrics that can monitor the progress of resilience and how international actors contribute to it, or do not.

Leverage the practical constraints of the moment. COVID-19 has almost entirely stopped international travel, interrupted much trade, and strained the resources of even the wealthiest states. This makes internationally driven approaches more difficult to import, lowers resources for responses, and provides new incentives for international actors to focus more on identifying and building existing capacities through existing local actors. Beyond the evident normative importance of local leadership, this circumstance presents an opportunity to bring positive change to the business model of international development and humanitarian actors. Solutions tailored to local circumstances, based on intimate knowledge of the resources, capacities, and skills that exist in communities, will be more sustainable and likely more effective than imported solutions. COVID-19 requires international actors to find ways of better enabling the agency of individuals and communities to lead these types of transformative approaches.

While localisation has been on the international community's agenda for some years, this crisis may have created the conditions for a real power and leadership shift to local actors. This means several practical project level changes to work modalities,²⁶ – such as more co-design and co-ownership of projects, partner-driven capacity strengthening accompanying project delivery, and approaches that are clearly committed to and supported for the long term.

If responses are to be transformative and resilience-enhancing, they need to build on existing systems, relationships, capacities, and processes. A renewed focus on local leadership does not mean internationally developed ideas or templates cannot be imported where appropriate and workable. However, based on the understanding that COVID-19 is a global, uncertain, evolving, and fast-moving stressor – and the different ways it impacts different societies and states – the information asymmetries between local to national, national to regional, and regional to international will likely only expand. In this sense, COVID-19 will not only require a shift in the business model of international humanitarian and development response, but it will rather demand it. Ultimately, this will require fundamental changes in financing modalities, donor incentives, power dynamics between funders and recipients, rules and regulations, role definitions, and where capacities and skills need to exist. How these changes are incentivised and intersect with norms and values of different local actors, donors, implementing organizations, and with codified norms like humanitarian principles and human rights

²⁶ Ryan Sheely and Hannah Kazis-Taylor, 'Opinion: How to Ensure that Your COVID-19 Remote Management Strategy Empowers Local Partners' Devex (2020) <<https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-how-to-ensure-that-your-Covid-19-remote-management-strategy-empowers-local-partners-97120>> accessed 25 May 2020.

frameworks will determine whether fundamental and lasting positive change at the global level – for peacebuilding and beyond – is achieved as one of the results of COVID-19.

Next Steps – Operationally Relevant Recommendations and Actions

Interpeace is developing recommendations and practical actions both for its own peacebuilding policy and programming and to inform the policy, programming and coordination of other international peacebuilding actors. These will be published in July 2020.

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Interpeace

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info@interpeace.org
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