



Call to Action for a Climate-Resilient Recovery from COVID-19

July 9, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has tragically exposed the risks humanity faces and how unprepared we are to respond.

People's health, well-being, and livelihoods are all affected. These threats are multiplied by the growing impacts of the climate crisis – more extreme storms, droughts, heat waves, food crises, and diseases – which have not stopped. Vulnerable populations are hit hardest: The pandemic could drive [100 million more people](#) into extreme poverty by the end of this year.

As the world responds, it must build back better. We can return to the old way of doing things or we can get on a new path, one that makes human society more resilient, more equitable, healthier, and stronger. These goals are interconnected and investments in the recovery should address multiple challenges. We must seize the opportunity to transform how we understand, plan, finance, and respond to risks. We must integrate climate resilience into decisions at all levels of government and by businesses, communities, and households, with particular focus on resilience in infrastructure and financial decisions. Innovative investment in research and development and finance can help countries deliver new solutions to both the pandemic and climate crises. Since COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease, we must meet it and similar threats by protecting the basic human right to a safe and healthy environment.

We have the opportunity to act now, but the window is short. Governments worldwide are investing more than \$10 trillion this year alone in crisis relief, after which accumulated debt may reduce the ability of governments to address urgent needs. Yet, to date, most stimulus packages have not sufficiently incorporated climate resilience into their recovery plans. This must change.

Investing in climate resilience is smart economics. According to the Global Commission on Adaptation's flagship [Adapt Now report](#), adaptation investments consistently deliver high returns, with benefit-cost ratios ranging from 2:1 to 10:1. We need to invest in economic activities that will create jobs, protect communities and natural ecosystems, and be durable in the face of our changing world. Adaptation often creates more jobs per dollar spent than more traditional investment, with superior local benefits.

We must act now, not wait for the next crisis to hit. Investing in climate resilience is better and less costly than waiting until after a disaster strikes. Early preparedness and prevention saves lives. Over the long run, inclusive, sustainable, and equitable economies are more robust.

Now is the time for global solidarity. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres [recently said](#), solidarity is not only a moral imperative, it is in everyone's interests. Demonstrating global solidarity with the world's poorest and most vulnerable can prevent more deaths from COVID-19, reduce the longer-term impacts on livelihoods and economies, address underlying human rights issues, and lower risks from the climate crisis and future shocks. Commitments to the UN response appeal have been increasing but are still insufficient. Support has been [directed more toward larger economies](#) than to places where poverty will increase the most as a result of the pandemic. Some countries may be reaching the limit of their national capacity, even as they repurpose their budgets in response to the emergency. For vulnerable countries to successfully

recover and advance, they will need urgent access to financial support and future debt relief from governments, multilateral development banks, and donors, including as committed under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The Global Commission on Adaptation calls on world leaders to incorporate climate resilience into economic recovery packages. World leaders should align policies with longer-term climate objectives, build global partnerships, and mobilize private sector support for improved climate resilience.

We call for accelerated progress in seven areas: Locally Led Adaptation, Urban Resilience, Water Resources Management, Social Safety Nets, Food Security, Nature-Based Solutions, and Disaster Prevention. These recommendations align with and support internationally agreed frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, while prioritizing an equitable and resilient recovery.

- 1. Locally Led Adaptation.** Vulnerable populations must have a voice and role in shaping the recovery in every key sector and system. The response must address underlying inequities in society and give agency to local actors on the frontlines of climate change, including marginalized communities, indigenous peoples, women and girls, and youth. This Commission, in its [flagship report](#) and Action Tracks, has repeatedly emphasized the importance of locally led action. Local planning and action, and investments in the existing social capital of communities, can help ensure that the best information is shared, resources are made available, and the best policies are enacted.
- 2. Urban Resilience.** Cities are on the frontlines of the current health crisis and many climate shocks. Yet more than [1 billion people](#) live in slums or informal settlements with little or no access to basic services. Improving the resilience of essential services in cities is critical and can be done through a strategic shift toward crisis-proof and equitable urban development. Shovel-ready, climate-smart projects include stormproof affordable housing, nature-based solutions, such as green roofs, and inclusive and sustainable sanitation systems, which can be implemented in even the poorest communities.
- 3. Water Resources Management.** Resilient access to fresh water is fundamental for health and sanitation and for economic productivity. Yet [3 billion people](#), 40 percent of the world's population, lack access to basic hand-washing facilities in their homes, and [4.2 billion people](#) lack safely managed sanitation. Climate-related flooding and droughts will lead to millions more people being affected. Solutions are often low-cost and high-return. Improving water, sanitation, and hygiene costs about \$0.29 per person per day. Water investments, like flood and drought management and pollution control, have benefit-cost ratios of up to 6:1.
- 4. Shock-Responsive Social Safety Nets.** The pandemic has revealed fault lines in countries' abilities to deliver urgently needed resources to vulnerable communities. Safety nets have helped lift [36 percent of the world's poor](#) out of extreme poverty; however, in low-income countries only 1 in 5 of the poorest people are covered. Countries can expand safety nets to cover more beneficiaries and provide greater support in response to a climate or health shock. Public works programs can provide jobs that also build resilience, for instance, in landscape restoration and community water infrastructure. Economic inclusion programs, widely proven to lift extremely poor households into sustainable livelihoods, also show significant promise toward resilient recoveries.
- 5. Food Security.** The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the fragility of our food and agriculture systems, leading to limited availability of and access to nutritious food. The [500 million small-scale farming households](#) in developing countries are especially at risk, including those in Africa and South Asia, many of whom also face devastating locust swarms with [links](#) to climate change. We need rapid interventions to strengthen food and nutrition security, improve food reserve policies, reduce agriculture and food workers' health risks, and safeguard migrant laborers. Investments in climate-informed digital advisory services can help farmers identify threats and access weather-based insurance and finance. Over the long term, we need to build resilient and sustainable food systems, which include a range of evidence-based interventions, such as agroecological approaches, and which are underpinned by international cooperation to fund farmer-oriented research & development to address global problems, such as drought, flooding, heat, and salinization.

6. **Nature-Based Solutions (NBS).** Natural solutions provided by healthy ecosystems and green infrastructure can deliver massive economic and resilience benefits. Compared to traditional infrastructure, they deliver more jobs per dollar, higher economic returns, and are faster to implement and more sustainable in the long run. Intact ecosystems can also limit the spread of zoonotic diseases. Protecting and restoring mangroves globally, at a cost of less than \$100 billion, could create **\$1 trillion in net benefits** by 2030. NBS investments also reduce carbon emissions, strengthen resilience to disasters, improve food security, decrease biodiversity loss, and benefit human and ecosystem health.
7. **Disaster Prevention.** COVID-19 has demonstrated the need to scale up investments in and access to digital technologies, funding mechanisms, and capacity-building solutions to better manage risks and avoid damage to build resilient societies. Forecast-based financing, for instance, can save lives, reduce damage, and speed up recovery. Spending \$800 million on early warning systems in developing countries would **avoid \$3 to 16 billion per year in losses**. To reach the most vulnerable, these efforts need to be coupled with investments in the capacity of “last mile” communities to act.

The [Global Commission on Adaptation](#) aims to accelerate action and inspire political leadership for a climate resilient future. It is led by Ban Ki-moon, Bill Gates and Kristalina Georgieva, and includes 35 Commissioners and 23 convening countries.

As global systems are being reset from the pandemic, the Global Commission on Adaptation and its partners are working to advance action in these areas. The Commission will report on progress at the [Climate Adaptation Summit](#) in the Netherlands in January 2021. These recommendations will be carried forward at COP26 in Glasgow and should be prioritized in the years to come.

SIGNED BY:



Ban Ki-moon



Inger Andersen



Michelle Bachelet



Winnie Byanyima



Jagan Chapagain



Patricia Espinosa



Christiana Figueres



Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven



Emma Howard Boyd



Naoko Ishii



Agnes Kalibata



Loren Legarda



Strive Masiyiwa



José Antonio Meade



Muhammad Musa



Cora van Nieuwenhuizen



Mari Pangestu



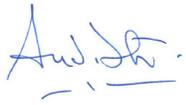
Sheela Patel



Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum



Feike Sijbesma



Andrew Steer



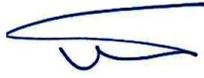
Achim Steiner



Simon Stiell



Francis Suarez



Petteri Taalas



Patrick Verkooijen



Rodger Voorhies



Shemara Wikramanayake



Jonathan Wilkinson

Note: Commissioners are signing this statement in their individual capacity. This statement does not necessarily reflect the views of the Commissioners' respective organizations, institutions, or governments.