

COVID-19, THE ENVIRONMENT AND FOOD SYSTEMS:

CONTAIN, COPE, AND REBUILD BETTER
FULL REPORT

Covid-19 Green Recovery Working Paper Series

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An evolving literature

The sheer volume of reports and evidence on COVID-19 is staggering. This is not surprising given the fundamental shifts in opportunities, threats to livelihoods and the associated responses and shifts in behaviours caused by the pandemic. The authors have attempted to synthesize, curate and assess this literature. This process continued until August 2020, at which point the report was drafted and reviewed. Given the sheer volume of evidence generated on a daily basis, the authors may have missed some literature. The situation will also have evolved between August and the date of publication. The report will be released online with associated perspective pieces both on the report itself and more generally on the nexus between COVID-19 macroeconomic responses, food systems and environmental impacts. We encourage readers to submit responses to Salman.Hussain@unep.org and Jacob.Salcone@unep.org.

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FULL REPORT



Kabita Deyam



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KEY MESSAGES

1. **Governments around the world have invested about \$12 trillion to counteract the economic effects of COVID-19. This investment could contribute to progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global climate targets if invested within a framework that supports both socioeconomic recovery and sustainability. Expenditures must be monitored to deliver multiple benefits simultaneously and guide rebuilding better.**
 - COVID-19 is an unprecedented global health and economic crisis. The fiscal and monetary stimulus to stabilize the economy and secure people's livelihoods as part of the global response to the pandemic so far totals \$11.7 trillion, equivalent to 13.9 per cent of global GDP. However, so far this investment has mostly ignored linkages to the environment, including the need to prevent further loss and degradation of habitat, which is associated with animal-to-human transmission and the spread of zoonotic diseases like COVID-19. Very little fiscal stimulus has targeted the green economy or investment in natural capital.
 - "Rebuilding better" requires targeted investment in sustainable development. The UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 places environmental sustainability and gender equality at the centre of the United Nations' response to COVID-19. The global response must build on the observed positive changes in people's behaviour and mindset during the crises, including how we travel, how we produce and consume food, and how we use environmental resources. It will require concerted action by governments, the private sector and everyone involved. The complex and globally interconnected nature of this transformation requires multilateral cooperation, monitoring the effects of the investments and sharing positive results. The crisis has created a new situation and requires new thinking and action.

- “Rebuilding better” must also be based on a global – not national – paradigm of aid and development assistance. The pandemic has shown that national borders are irrelevant to global issues like health, food security and sustainability. Landscapes, ecological zones and the nexus between health, environment and economic activities are key features that must be addressed working together.

2. COVID-19 increases poverty and limits access to food. The right to food is a basic human right and should always have highest priority. During a pandemic, food security is a precondition for successfully fighting the virus. Hungry people will not accept measures like social distancing and lockdowns.



- The World Bank estimates that economic contractions could push 70–100 million people into extreme poverty in 2020. Similarly, the number of people suffering acute hunger could double from 135 million to 265 million by the end of the year. As the guardians of household food and water security, women are disproportionately affected by the impacts

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