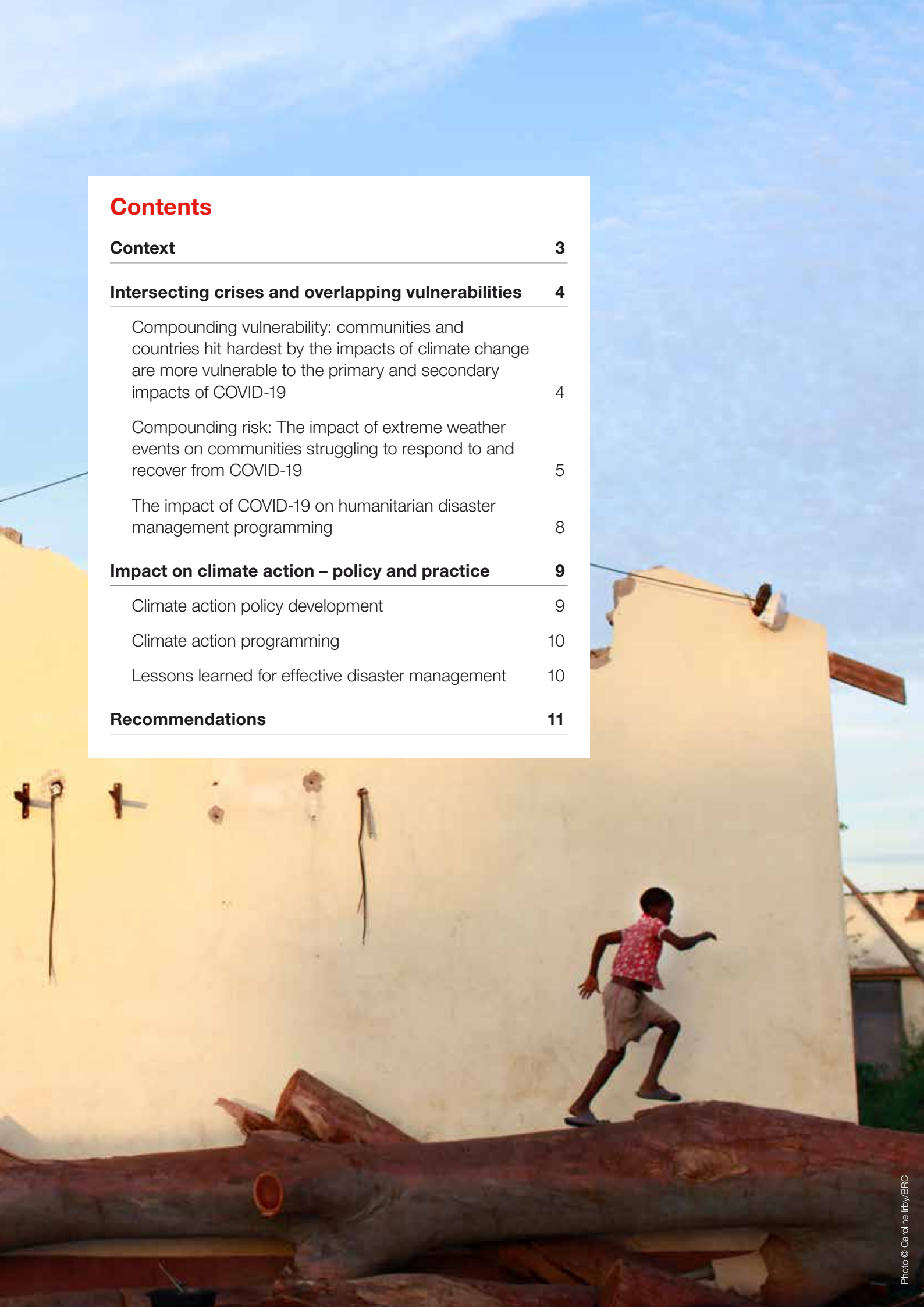
British Red Cross

Policy brief: COVID-19 and the climate crisis

June 2020

The power of kindness

Contents



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Context

As of 21 May 2020, there are around 5 million confirmed cases of coronavirus in 188 countries, and at least 320,000 fatalities.[1] It can be anticipated that vulnerable communities will disproportionately feel the brunt of this crisis and although data in certain communities is scarce and likely unreliable, there is widespread recognition that spread of the virus in these contexts could lead to catastrophic humanitarian consequences. The UN Climate Change Executive Secretary, Patricia Espinosa has stated that whilst COVID-19 is one of the most urgent threats facing humanity today, it should not be forgotten that climate change is the biggest threat over the long term.[2]

Climate change is a humanitarian issue and a priority area for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement). More than 90 percent of natural hazard disasters are now regarded as climate-related and climate change amplifies existing risks and creates new risks for natural and human systems. These risks are unevenly distributed and are generally greater for vulnerable people living in **low-income countries**. For instance, vulnerable people who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods are facing increased risk of declining yields, failing crops, pests, and diseases; displaced persons (including refugees and internally displaced persons) often live in disaster-prone and climate-exposed areas. Moreover, the rapid rate of urbanisation, including growing informal settlements around urban and coastal areas, is ramping up exposure and vulnerability to climate risks in cities the world over.

Connections between climate change and COVID-19 are evident. Andrew Norton, Director of the International Institute for Environment and Development, has stated "Land-use change and deforestation…heighten the risk of further pandemics by bringing humans into contact with new threats such as the coronavirus. Every species lost is an irreversible event that decreases the resilience of natural and human systems on a permanent basis."[3] From a humanitarian perspective, British Red Cross is concerned about the compounding risks of both the pandemic and of climate and weather related extreme events. COVID-19 also has the potential to have a large impact on climate action.

This briefing note highlights the intersecting nature of these crises, both in terms of the vulnerabilities caused by climate change making it more difficult for communities to curtail and respond to the impacts of COVID-19, but also the risk of impending extreme weather and climate events that will be further complicated due to COVID-19 restrictions and already overstretched community and humanitarian response systems. This briefing also explores the importance of ensuring that any evaluations of the global response to COVID-19 inform future disaster response including extreme weather, as well as exploring the immediate and longer-term impacts that COVID-19 will have on climate action. It concludes with recommendations for the humanitarian sector, national governments as well as the international community.

This paper has been developed with insights from across the Movement, including information from colleagues within the Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies (NSs); the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre;[4] BRC regional and technical colleagues as well as external public resources.

1 Accurate as of 21 May 2020 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-51235105
2 www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/covid19.html
3 www.iied.org/covid-19-crisis-shows-governments-can-also-act-save-nature-climate
4 www.climatecentre.org

Intersecting crises and overlapping vulnerabilities

Compounding vulnerability: communities and countries hit hardest by the impacts of climate change are more vulnerable to the primary and secondary impacts of COVID-19

Climate change, including extreme climate and weather-related events, exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and can lead to food insecurity, displacement, health risks, lack of access to adequate clean water and more. These issues in turn can increase the vulnerability of communities and individuals to COVID-19, by affecting their ability to prevent transmission, as well as respond to and recover from the virus. Although this is most visible in least developed countries (LDCs) this is also evident in countries such as the UK. A few examples are outlined below.

Preventing transmission by implementing hygiene strategies such as hand washing will not be possible in places where communities experience **reduced water access** due to the impacts of climate change. Islands in the North Pacific may have to contend with drought-like conditions in addition to COVID-19. Lemau Afamasaga from the Palau Red Cross Society reflected "In the past couple of months, part of the work is encouraging local communities to wash their hands but...we were asked, 'How do we wash our hands when there is a lack of water?'."

Social distancing and **quarantine measures for those infected** are likely to be difficult for people who have been displaced by the impacts of climate change and living in precarious housing arrangements, in camps or in other overcrowded conditions.

COVID-19 will significantly impact populations who experience **food insecurity** and who are undernourished. Over 20% of the population on the African continent are classified as undernourished – the highest percentage on the planet.[5] Existing evidence suggests that the elderly and those whose health is already compromised are at higher risk of becoming ill and dying as a result of the virus, this is also likely to include malnourished people.[6] For many children, school feeding programmes account for nearly 50% of their daily calories and with schools shutting down, this critical lifeline of food is no longer available. As a result of the pandemic, there has also been a general reduction in access to fresh food and high nutritional values, which are essential to boost the immune system. In addition, market disruption, immediate loss of livelihoods and lack of access to social safety nets as a result of quarantines, bans, and restrictions on movement may have further dramatic impacts on food and nutrition security.

People who are on the move because of effects of climate risks are likely to be more vulnerable to the virus. Migrants face barriers in accessing basic services such as healthcare, as well as access to reliable information on the virus. Measures taken to combat the spread of COVID-19 mean borders will be closed and mobility will be reduced, which may result in migrants becoming trapped in areas with no access to basic services or support. This has already been reported in Niger and Burkina Faso and therefore, existing humanitarian assistance including cash, food and accommodation as well as psychosocial support (PSS), will need to be increased to target these populations.

Climate, conflict and COVID-19 – The combined effects of climate change and conflict will exacerbate the impact of COVID-19. Where outbreaks take place in areas of active conflict, humanitarian actors may struggle to get access to affected populations. In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) and INGOs struggled to contain an Ebola outbreak in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), due to violence. COVID-19 is expected to have similar impacts. Populations in and around conflict areas may be prevented from leaving by certain groups and violence, which will also make it dangerous for humanitarian actors to deliver assistance. Their needs will be exacerbated by the impacts of extreme weather leaving communities exceptionally vulnerable.

5 https://insight.wfp.org/covid-19-and-the-5-major-threats-it-poses-to-global-food-security-1c4da2ff6657
6 *Ibid*

Recovery from extreme weather such as **flooding** will also be slowed due to COVID-19. In the UK, recent flooding has left many struggling to cope with the impact of COVID-19 and the measures introduced in response. In November 2019 heavy rain and floods affected Fishlake, South Yorkshire, and in February 2020 across Wales and the Midlands towns were impacted by Storms Ciara, Dennis and Jorge. There have been reports of families, including those considered vulnerable and shielding, living in temporary accommodation, living upstairs or staying with friends.[7] Recovery work for those affected has also delayed by lockdown measures which restrict industry and movement introduced to stop the spread of COVID-19.[8] Local businesses, already under significant economic strain from flooding damage, now face a second round of financial pressure.

Compounding risk: The impact of extreme weather events on communities struggling to respond to and recover from COVID-19

Humanitarian crises, including climate and weather-related crises will continue to hit while countries are struggling to respond to COVID-19. Countries will face multi-hazard risks with new shocks exacerbating the impacts of COVID-19 on already vulnerable communities.

Countries and communities hit by extreme weather events, for instance a cyclone, may have existing damage to vital **infrastructure including healthcare facilities**. This may result in the public health systems struggling to manage with an increase in caseload due to the virus. This is particularly true in terms of laboratory capacity, case management, infection prevention and control, bed capacity, and intensive care facilities. In addition, weak healthcare systems that may be overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients, will have limited capacity to respond to the next weather related event. New shocks will further stretch capacity of emergency response bodies and restrictions in place to tackle the virus will make responses even more challenging.[9] It is known that resilient, equitable and well-resourced health systems are essential to recover from climate-related disasters, as shown by communities in Haiti, which would have been much more adept to cope and recover from Hurricane Matthew of 2016, had they had a strong health system in place.[10]

It is possible to anticipate upcoming extreme weather events through early warning systems; WMO's Global Observing System provides observations for the preparation of weather analyses, forecasts, advisories and warnings by the 193 WMO Member states and territories.[11] This information allows state and humanitarian organisation to update **the Early Action Protocols** that are in place.[12] The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) are working with NS and partners to explore on how these might need to be adjusted to be functioning in COVID-19 times.[13] Based on available data, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre has compiled a series of examples from **Asian and Pacific island nations,** from India to the Philippines who are currently struggling to respond to COVID-19 and are having to consider how their stretched disaster response capacity will be able to deal with weather-related crises in the coming months as it becomes the season of monsoons, heatwaves and cyclones. [14]

7 'First flood, now pandemic: how village devastated by submersion is facing coronavirus threat', The Independent. [Available at: www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-floods-fishlake-covid-19-ironbridge-a9438566.html].
8 'Coronavirus lockdown hits Fishlake flood recovery efforts', BBC News. [Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-52578642]. 'Coronavirus: Shropshire flood recovery 'stalled'', BBC News. [Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-52036241].
9 Although this paper focusses on climate shocks, there is a need to revise standard operating procedures and contingency plans for other hazards like earthquake too.
10 www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/climate-change-coronavirus-linked/
11 https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/wmo-concerned-about-impact-of-covid-19-observing-system
12 https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/fba/
13 However, WMO is concerned about impact of COVID-19 on observing system and there is concern about how Early warning systems will function and be communicated.
14 www.climatecentre.org/news/1272/a-virus-hit-asian-nations-brace-for-double-disasters-as-extreme-weather-loomsa

Cyclone season

Cyclone season in India started in early May[15] and traditional responses to extreme weather including the use of shelters, will be difficult to manage whilst also maintaining COVID-19 prevention measures, such as social distancing.[16] To maintain social-distancing requirements, India would need to double the space available to shelter people from extreme weather. A member of the country's National Disaster Management Authority has said this could mean schools and colleges currently closed by the virus outbreak, as well as other buildings, needing to be turned into shelter sites.

The Philippines are already trying to balance their response to the people affected by COVID-19 in addition to supporting thousands of people displaced by a volcano eruption in January and by last year's cyclones. The situation may become even more stretched as the Philippine monsoon season starts in May but most of the more than 20 storms the country sees each year come between June and August.

In the Caribbean all regional forecasters are predicting an 'Above Average Season' for tropical storms and hurricanes;17 one prediction is for 16 named storms and 4 of these developing into major hurricanes. Even though the Atlantic hurricane season doesn't start officially until June 1, there has been a named storm before that day every year since 2015. In May 2020 Tropical Storm Arthur developed near the Florida coast.[18] As well as the need to adapting responses to the COVID-19 context, such as social distancing measures in Hurricane Shelters, there are also major effects on livelihoods in the region. A recent WFP report found that 50% of people anticipate a moderate to severe or severe impact on their livelihood due to COVID-19.19 This will affect the ability for households to stockpile emergency supplies, prepare their shelters and generally respond to hurricanes like they normally would.

Heatwaves

Every year, heatwaves claim the lives of infants, older people, and those with chronic health conditions. The urban poor frequently bear the brunt of this. In addition to threatening the lives and health of vulnerable populations, heatwaves have cascading impacts in other areas of society, such as reduced economic output, strained health systems and rolling power outages. With communities already stretched in response to COVID-19, vulnerable communities will struggle to respond to this year's heatwaves. May and June are the hottest months for India and Pakistan and an intense heatwave last year caused widespread deaths. People who are in lockdown because of COVID-19 could face health risks if they do not have access to adequate cooling or sufficient water. Additionally, hospitals that re already stretched coping with COVID-19 will be even more stretched if people need to be treated for heatwaves.

Flooding

In Kenya, heavy rains have already caused flash floods and landslides and the Kenya Meteorological Department has warned that the ongoing rains will increase. In less than 24 hours, two separate landslide incidents were reported in Kunyak, Kericho and Tinderet in Nandi County. According to the Kenya Red Cross, residents have been moved to safer ground as heavy rains continue to affect both areas. The rains have caused difficulties in Kisumu county where families have been displaced in Nyando, Kisumu Central and Nyakach leading to concerns that overcrowding in rescue centres could spread COVID-19. The Kenya Red Cross reports that access to health facilities for suspected COVID-19 cases is becoming a challenge with roads cut and bridges destroyed by the floods and calls for an integrated approach in the response to support the people facing the double crisis. Interior Cabinet Secretary Fred Matiang'i has asked Kenyans who live in risk-prone areas to move to higher ground.[20]

15 www.climatecentre.org/news/1272/a-virus-hit-asian-nations-brace-for-double-disasters-as-extreme-weather-loomsa
16 As of 26 May 2020, India currently under lockdown with more than 96,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19
17 All seasonal forecasts agree it will be an above average season – but the main source at present is Colorado State University; (www.wtoc.com/2020/05/01/hurricane-season-why-this-season-could-be-more-active/)
18 Tropical Storm Arthur developed in the Atlantic Ocean near the Florida coast (www.accuweather.com/en/hurricane/tropical-storm-arthur-conditions-set-stage-for-early-start-to-season/740563
19 https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000114475/download/?_ga=2.244711109.1758506614.1589881948-826752542.1589881948
20 www.kbc.co.ke/heavy-rains-to-persist-as-floods-wreak-havoc

Food insecurity

Climate change is a major driver of food insecurity. Climate change affects agriculture as crops need suitable soil, water, sunlight, and heat to grow. As the weather becomes more extreme and unpredictable it compromises peoples' ability to grow food to feed their families and generate an income. This is especially challenging for the world's poorer, rural communities who often rely on farming and agriculture as their main source of sustenance. Climate related disasters such as droughts, floods, and storms can destroy crops, infrastructure, and community assets impacting livelihoods and food availability. Lack of access to food often causes food prices to rise, consequently resulting in people resorting to negative coping strategies to meet their basic food needs.

Projections of food security levels in **West and Central Africa (WCA)** indicate that during the current COVID-19 crisis, extreme weather will exacerbate an already tenuous food security situation. In December 2019, 10.8 million people were experiencing food insecurity, crisis phase (phase 3 out of 5) through 16 countries of the Sahel and WCA region. This number could reach 15.5 million by August 2020 (lean season), which could be a record of the last 15 years. This is due to a number of factors including late rainy season (the raining season started with a delay of two months in Mauritania and Senegal); poor spatial and temporal distribution of rainfall; irregular rains with longer-lasting drought episodes; rainfall deficits; localised floods at the end of the season; situation aggravated by the repetition of these rainfall deficits for several years. This situation will be exacerbated by border closures, quarantines, and supply chain and trade disruptions could restrict people's access to sufficient/diverse and nutritious sources of food.[21]

WFP estimates that a total of 20 million people across nine **East African** countries are food insecure and this is likely to increase to between 34 to 43 million during May and July due to COVID-19 and its consequences.[22] A new desert locust wave is threatening the new crop season in Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia and the livelihoods of people that depend on them for survival. Travel restrictions are causing delays in the supply of pesticides. In urban settings, hundreds of thousands of people employed in the informal sector have already lost their sources of income.

Prior to the pandemic, food insecurity in the **Southern Africa** region was already alarmingly high, with a record 45 million food insecure people. It is estimated by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) that acute malnutrition rates will increase by 25% in the region.[23] COVID-19 may exacerbate the food security situation of 1.3 million people already acutely food insecure in Sierra Leone or of 4.3 million in Zimbabwe.[24]

21 www.fao.org/2019-ncov/q-and-a/impact-on-food-and-agriculture/en
22 https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/wfp-east-africa-covid-19-update-24-april-2020
23 SADC food security quarterly update Jan – Mar 2020
24 www.livelihoodscentre.org/documents/114097690/181759481/FSL+Impact+and+COVID+19.pdf/1f4fc1c2-73d1-f756-5c1d-e8e33b94026d?t=1586863881452

The impact of COVID-19 on humanitarian disaster management programming

The humanitarian sector faces challenges responding to COVID-19, preparing for extreme weather events as well as maintaining existing critical programming, including depleted financial and humanitarian resources and humanitarian access.

There are concerns about the stability of financial assistance from traditional donor countries who at present are struggling to manage their own domestic responses and may de-prioritise international humanitarian funding. Meanwhile, many vital ongoing community resilience and preparedness programmes have been put on hold or resources have been redirected.

Many INGO staff have returned to their country of origin or face travel restrictions, reducing international personnel available to support the response. INGO staff may also be stigmatised due to the fear of transmission.

In this context, **national actors**, such as Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, will shoulder an increasingly significant proportion of the response. As an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, National Societies are already working to prevent transmission of the virus. They are helping communities already affected to maintain access to basic services, and reduce economic, social and psychological impacts. However, national actors will face heavy challenges in terms of **capacity**, impacting both their ability to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak and maintain their existing lifesaving work.

Containment measures may impact delivery of humanitarian services and disrupt supply chains for essential materials. The lack of PPE for staff and volunteers also might reduce their capacity to respond as they will be reluctant to put staff in danger or risk further transmission to communities.

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Impact on climate action – policy and practice

Climate action policy development

There is international recognition that we are at a critical juncture for climate action; realities of climate crisis are hitting hard and at an increasing rate. 2020 was recognised as a vitally important year for climate action, with COP 26 acting as the important moment for international action due to the deadline for renewed Nationally Determined Contributions. There is widespread recognition that the COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact on global and national progress on this issue. This has the potential to impact in the short term (delayed negotiations ahead of COP 26) but also longer-term decisions whilst countries recover. The impact of COVID-19 brings large threats, but also opportunities for climate action.

Measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have resulted in certain industries being closed down, along with transport networks and businesses closing down, travel restrictions imposed and air travel being drastically reduced. This has resulted in a drop in air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. For example compared spring 2019, levels of pollution in New York City have reduced by nearly 50% because of measures to contain the virus.[25] However, this is only short term that has little effect on the climate change trajectory and there is a concern that as the pandemic subsides, carbon and pollution emissions could rapidly increase again. There needs to be a careful assessment against creating a false view that things are improving rather than focussing on the potential impact that could be achieved if we aspire to long term structural change.[26]

Global diplomacy on climate action has been affected both by measures taken to reduce the spread of COVID-19 such as cancelling planned meetings, but also through governments having to focus on their immediate domestic responses. The impact of this could be that the momentum generated by such meetings and events, not to mention the attention of public and policy-makers, in the run up to COP 26 could be lost. However, it is promising to see that innovation is already happening and the intersessional meeting has been run online as well as certain roundtable discussion to explore the issues of climate in depth. The development of tools such as the mini-site from the Red Cross Climate Centre that support for those aiming to ensure online interaction is productive and efficient.[27]

Additionally, it is yet to be seen how this will impact longer-term **international relations**; whether the international community will take this as an opportunity to reflect and recognise the transnational nature of the threats we face and work towards a revival of international cooperation and multilateralism, or whether responses will lead to increasingly nationalist responses, with border closures being implemented more permanently, and an increase in the more nationalistic policy of "looking after your own[28]".

National domestic policy making has already, and will continue to be, greatly affected. Economies will be impacted for many years to come with widespread concern about recovery. This could lead to a lack of enthusiasm for financing climate action, especially if prosperity falls. This will be the case for donor countries as well as countries vulnerable to the immediate impacts of climate change, for instance Bangladesh. With its globally linked economy, Bangladesh is likely to see significant negative impacts on manufacturing, exports and possibly even food production going forward.[29] In addition to the impact on decision making, practical considerations in the UK for instance include the impact on national GDP will also be a threat to international assistance including climate adaption and resilience building as the percentage of GDP for ODA will be impacted.

25 www.bbc.com/future/article/20200326-covid-19-the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-the-environment
26 www.iied.org/coronavirus-climate-change-are-two-crises-need-humanity-unite
27 https://climatecentre.org/news/1269/climate-centre-launches-minisite-for-i-virtually-amazing-i-resources
28 www.linkedin.com/pulse/crises-covid-climatehow-can-we-change-our-trajectory-ben-webster?articleId=6658641278558851072#comments-6658641278558851072&trk=public_profile_article_view
29 https://friendship.ngo/covid-19-and-climate-change

As focus shifts onto developing longer term recovery strategies, the decisions made about investment will be critical for climate action. Discussions are already underway for major economic recovery (fiscal stimulus) packages to address the impacts of lockdowns – it is important to use these to accelerate investments in green energy and transport, resilient infrastructure and climate change adaptation to build back better.

At an **individual level**, there is the potential that the experience of responding to COVID-19 will reinforce for people that behavioural changes can make a real difference and spur individual action (however we cannot be sure how people will react once restrictions are lifted and they can travel again). There could also be the possibility for increased support from the public for policy based on evidence, science, and prevention; recognition of our societal interdependence and that everyone's health is interlinked. Recent experience could also generate pressure from employees to adapt business behaviours, such as reducing travel and hosting virtual meetings, commuting less and working more from home. However, people preoccupied about the health of themselves, friends and family and their financial stability may have limited capacity left to think longer term about the future of the planet.

Climate action programming

At a **programme level**, there is concern about the longer term impact on funding for programmes. Decisions may be made to divert funding from longer term climate change adaption to respond to the immediate impacts of COVID-19.

Lessons learned for effective disaster management

Although the type of emergency is itself different, there are a significant number of parallels between the pandemic and climate change. Some lessons can be drawn on regarding how best prepare for the much bigger problem of climate change impacts.[30]

The majority of the learning from the COVID-19 response will begin to emerge as the immediate response phase subsides and evaluations take place. This should be kept in mind during COVID-19 responses, when considering what data to collect, what monitoring and evaluations systems are in place to ensure we are well placed to respond. However, there are already some immediate transferable reflections that should be captured.

As we are in the middle of the crisis, we are able to reflect on the success of various government approaches to the immediate and medium terms responses. It appears at this early stage, there are some immediate lessons for disaster risk management include:

- Responses to the pandemic evidence the benefits of acting early; there are examples internationally that show the negative impact of waiting to act once the problem had developed into a crisis rather than taking action when facing advance warning from scientists. Early action can prevent some of the worst impacts, and this is also the case for climate change adaptation as well as mitigation;
- This pandemic has shown the importance of being **risk informed** and the need to get much better at tracking global risks and stress-testing financial preparedness;
- The importance of **building community level resilience** through planning structures, strong networks of local volunteers, a robust basic healthcare system and adaptive Social Protection mechanisms;
- The importance of International cooperation;
- Predictable funding from the international community; if international partners make ad hoc funding decisions in real time, this can lead to late, inadequate, stop-start response, itself causing avoidable suffering and pushing people further into poverty and vulnerability; and [31]
- Effective and responsive Governance **supported by civil society.**

30 www.disasterprotection.org/latest-news/covid-19-caught-the-world-off-guard-pandemics-must-never-surprise-us-again
31 www.disasterprotection.org/latest-news/covid-19-caught-the-world-off-guard-pandemics-must-never-surprise-us-again

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Scale up humanitarian action to support climate hit communities to respond to COVID-19 and to prepare communities for upcoming extreme weather events

1. Maintain and adapt **existing humanitarian programming** to respond to COVID-19.
2. **Upscale humanitarian support:** support countries that are already impacted by climate change that will need additional financial, technical or operational resources to prevent further infections. A scaled up response can be facilitated by **building on existing networks, programmes and expertise.**
3. **Humanitarian responses should take COVID-19 prevention considerations into account, including:** physical distancing; continuous disinfection of locations such as shelters; maintaining proper ventilation and supporting staff and volunteers to remain safe through PPE and other measures. There also needs to be a redesign of early warning, redefine of evacuation and shelter procedures, changes to healthcare and first aid protocols, and generally adapting humanitarian assistance.[32]
4. **Develop a dual hazard strategy** to support communities prepare for and respond to extreme weather during COVID-19. Planning should already be underway for managing the intersecting challenges of COVID-19 and seasonal climate events, extreme weather and the impacts of extreme weather such as increasing food insecurity, ensuring that there is enough capacity to support communities in the short and long term, despite the current crisis.
5. **Convert early warning into early action:** Prepare now to facilitate **risk informed early action**, which is evidenced to be better value for money as well as more effective at saving lives. IFRC's forecast based financing team has a seasonal calendar of upcoming hazards where there are early action protocols in place. These plans – and the plans of other agencies – should be adjusted now, to take into account the current reality. It is essential that governments pay attention to their national early warning and weather observing capacities despite the COVID-19 crisis and to act in advance rather than waiting for the extreme weather to hit.[33]
6. **Finance a surge in health system capacity and social protection instruments** in low income countries. This offers a first opportunity to generate long-term benefits, beyond the current crisis: if sustainably designed, these improvements in health care and social protection can build resilience to future shocks, including natural disasters and the impacts of climate change.
7. **Responses should consider the impacts on climate change by using climate-smart approaches and reducing their climate and environmental impact.** Whilst life-saving interventions must always remain the priority aim of any emergency response operation, action must be taken to minimise its adverse impacts on the surrounding environment and eco-systems including through: emergency waste management; sustainable levels of water use; sanitation; energy consumption; displaced people's camps; and transport and green procurement.[34]

32 Ahmadul Haque, Director of Bangladesh's world-famous Cyclone Preparedness Programme

Recommendation 2: Leave no one behind

Communities most in need and who are hardest to reach should receive inclusive humanitarian assistance to respond to COVID-19 as well prepare for the impacts of extreme weather events. This should include targeted support addressing needs among particular group including women and girls; unaccompanied and separated children; individuals with disabilities; the elderly; survivors of trafficking; LGBTI; and refugees and migrant communities.

Recommendation 3: Empower local action

1. Support those with disaster management experience, including National Societies who work with their respective Disaster Management agencies with decades of experience
2. **Invest in local capacities**. Just as extreme insecurity in conflict zones has in some cases meant only local responders can operate, the COVID-19 crisis has created a similar dynamic. As the pandemic progresses and travel restrictions continue, local actors are increasingly the only responders on the ground. Local actors will also continue to lead the humanitarian response as extreme weather hits. Investment is needed in sustainable institutional capacities for preparedness and response to epidemics. Decision-making and funding should be directed to the local level, empowering communities to manage changing risks, including through increased engagement with and support to local actors.
3. Longer term, the role of local actors in climate action must be enabled, including through **promoting decentralised, equitable, transparent and accountable disbursement of climate finance.** This should be a part of discussions in the run up to and during COP 26.

Recommendation 4: Integrate risk management approaches

1. **Integrated risk management approaches** must be implemented by aligning disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and ecosystem management efforts, humanitarian responses and development in policies, plans, laws and investment decisions.
2. Ensure the **learning from COVID-19 responses improve future disaster risk management, including climate risks.** Pandemics and extreme weather events can appear very different, but fundamentally both require effective disaster risk management and have many more parallels than would first appear.

Recommendation 5: National recovery efforts should be consistent with scaled up mitigation ambitions

1. **The policy decisions that will need to be made to support recovery from COVID-19 offer a significant opportunity to build a more resilient and sustainable future**, supporting efforts to mitigate climate change. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' six climate-related actions to shape recovery included delivering "new jobs and businesses through a clean, green transition."[35]

2. **Businesses and individuals to harness greener behaviours trialled and developed through this process** including:

   - Consider remote working where possible
   - Consider alternatives to international travel using the remote working tools
   - Upskill staff and support them to develop good practice utilising the expertise of organizations such as the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and "Virtually amazing" training to facilitate interactive, meaningful, effective virtual engagements.[36]

3. **Nationally** policy making should ensure that it **thinks long term as we consider recovery packages** as this period in time has the potential to be transformative.

   - Recovery should be underpinned by **resilience**
   - **Fund elements of the green transition**, thereby creating jobs and helping economies recover and shift to a low emissions future
   - Consider a **large public spending component in a stimulus package based on decarbonisation of the world economy.** A wide range of investments could include production of renewable energy; preservation or restoration of natural areas that provide ecosystem services and resilience to floods, drought, and hurricanes; investments in water treatment and sanitation; and restoring degraded forestlands and landscapes. This could create many jobs over the short term while also generating net benefits worth hundreds of billions of dollars from watershed protection, better crop yields, and forest products. In Ethiopia, for instance, the Humbo Assisted Natural Regeneration Project increased local incomes and helped restore 2,700 hectares of biodiverse native forest, boosting carbon sequestration benefits and more tree cover reduced local drought vulnerability.[37]

Recommendation 6: Continue to build momentum on climate action

1. **Continue to raise awareness of the risks of climate crisis** and encourage all actors to scale up their mitigation ambition whilst also supporting scaled up adaptation action now. Although many nations will be understandably consumed by responding to COVID-19, the UN Secretary General reminds us that "The impact of the coronavirus is both immediate and dreadful. But there is another, deep emergency – the planet's unfolding environmental crisis."

2. **Continue to invest in and improve climate change adaptation**

   - Continue to engage remotely to form and strengthen coalitions, including the Risk Informed Early Action Partnership;[38]
   - Continue to engage in and facilitate sharing of good practice;
   - Ensure that existing programming is maintained and the future financing is available for climate change adaptation.

3. **Maintain Diplomatic momentum ahead of COP 26**

   - Where possible hold remote meetings to allow the international community to engage in discussion, make commitments and take actions. This includes annual meetings and formal process for COP 26 such as the Intersessional meetings, but also briefing together new partnerships;
   - Continue to report against and pledge climate commitments ahead of COP 26, even though it has been delayed;
   - Make sure poorer countries are not disenfranchised during the process of transition to virtual meetings by making sure they are able to engage and there is equality of voice in mind.

4. **Lead by example with domestic policy making and legislation towards achieving net zero**

   - Submit an ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) 2030 targets that are net zero aligned; the UK government have pledged to share a strong NDC ahead of COP 26 along with other countries, so important to be ambitious;
   - The UK should provide increased support to ensure that developing countries have the means to deliver ambitious NDCs and put themselves on inclusive and sustainable low-carbon and climate change resilient development pathways.

5. **Encourage sustained global solidarity** to work together to tackle the climate crisis. COVID-19 has shown the world that we are only as strong as the weakest health system and we need to maintain this recognition to tackle the even bigger crisis of climate change.

38 www.climatecentre.org/news/1199/risk-informed-early-action-partnership-a-a-reapa-a-launched-at-climateaction-summit-a-let-us-work-together-for-a-safe-world-for-our-future-generationa

For more information, please contact
Eleanor Hevey, Head of Humanitarian Policy
EleanorHevey@redcross.org.uk