



**#newnormals of Humanitarian Action
Signals Intelligence Initiative**

May 2020

A few words about this initiative and document:

The objective of this initiative was to curate “signals of change” across colleagues from the three organizations of issues that may point to the future of humanitarian organizations and action. A signals gathering process is usually the baseline of a longer-term process in which to design scenarios or recommendations for specific programming. It is hoped that these signals, and insights might be helpful to institutions if they are developing their own scenarios. It is also important to place these signals and insights as a ‘point in time’ in our collective intelligence process. In our recommendation to repeat this initiative, we will iterate by having the signals collection be more consolidated while investing more into broad-based inclusive sensemaking and analysis.

Feedback on the signals from participants included four main themes, which we feel is important to include here:

1. An overall gender and diversity blindness. “A discussion of futures can’t ignore that these futures differ significantly for women and girls, and for migrants and refugees, for LGBTQ+ people, tending towards looking significantly bleaker than those of their privileged, straight, and/or male counterparts.”
2. An interest in having the insights be more practical and with actionable recommendations and a more simplicity and directness in the text itself.
3. A desire for more emphasis on the longer-term effects of COVID-19 on health and the massive knock-on effects for health service providers and the programmes needed.
4. A keen interest in participating in a trans-organizational effort and a great willingness to continue iteration as pointers to what the #newnormals of Humanitarian Action might be.

“A high-resilience system encourages foresight, shares the burden of managing risk, encourages innovation and cooperation, and is resistant to disruptive actors that aim to undermine the basis for cooperation. In contrast, a low-resilience system is absorbed by firefighting the most immediate crisis, places the burden of risks on actors who are least equipped to manage them, and is prone to increasing polarisation and conflict. A strategy for resilience builds a commitment to collective action that delivers lasting benefits, while stimulating the will to co-operate. This does not simply happen. It requires effective leadership, broad participation, an investment in building alliances and networks, and clear communication of problems, solutions, and successes¹.”

Alex Evans & David Stevens, May 2020

The **#newnormals Signals Intelligence Initiative** is an experiment in tripartite agency foresight among MSF, UNHCR and ICRC to better understand the future(s) of humanitarianism post-COVID. These agencies have been sharing institutional innovation best practice for a few years and this is the first tripartite foresight project across our three agencies as part of what we hope to be continued inter-agency collective intelligence.

The disruption of the global pandemic has challenged all of our institutions across our models, structure and services. It has challenged our ability to be prepared in the face of seismic shifts and the ways in which we work. It has also opened up new ways of thinking and of relating to each other. Things that were previously ‘profoundly difficult’, we have now embraced quickly. We have innovated in the cold front of need and we have found empathy as a salve to our collective anxiety.

This foresight experiment was born out of the realization that whilst our institutions were doing what they do best - firefighting and contingency planning to solve the emergencies of today - there was and still is so much *converging uncertainties* that is deeply unsettling. We are in the liminal space where the collective uncertain futures of our work loom over us. We say futures as a plural as the range of possible futures of our common work has expanded exponentially. We found that we had more questions than we had

answers. Most prevalent of these questions was ‘*how do we plan for the longer term when we have no idea what is going to unfold?*’.

This experiment aimed at unearthing diverse points of view across our three agencies to better understand these unfolding uncertainties. This initiative is not meant to replace any current scenario or contingency planning processes, but rather to complement what is being done by offering a wider participatory set of collective intelligence. It hopes to help cut through the noise of disruption, contribute to sense-making and inspire anticipatory, longer-term thinking. By provoking potential future trajectories and emergent ideas of what might be, we can explore beyond the first order impacts of today. Though the signals present data that is likely already known, it is the wider range of knowledge points, the convergence of these issues and the expanse of participatory intelligence of the exercise that nuances the importance of the signals. We asked ourselves this fundamental question: *how might strategic decision making change if presented with this information?*

There are a few fundamental assumptions underpinning this initiative:

- That diverse, participatory scanning might unearth perspectives or views that would challenge homogeneity.
- That collective ideation on what could be, without a preset agenda or project, helps foster a greater sense of inter-agency togetherness.
- That this reflections analysis would capture honestly what participants put forward, not compromised in any way.

The scanning initiative ran for one week in early May 2020 and 65 people across the three agencies participated. Participants came from wide geographies - from Syria to Amsterdam - and held diverse roles within their institutions. Results were captured both in an Airtable platform and a Google sheet. A total of 172 ‘signals’ (data points) were collected. These signals were then analysed by the core project team of seven people across the agencies. These signals are clustered below into 12 themes and presented in the annex. Each cluster also offers further provocations that participants highlighted - as a nudge for our institutions to consider. There are continuous loops across all the clusters, each somewhat dependent and connected to each

¹ <https://www.longcrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-19-and-the-Long-Crisis-of-Globalisation-17May20.pdf>

other. This isn't surprising - and points to the fact that our future is complicated, and our realities don't fall into easy-to-define silos.

It is important to place these signals and insights as a 'point in time' in our collective intelligence process. Our world is changing so rapidly that even in the space of a few weeks since these signals were gathered, further developments have occurred. We don't present this as a fait accompli in any way, rather as an invitation for further, continuous iteration as pointers to what the #newnormals of humanitarian action might be.

What did we unearth through this process?

Insight #1: System humanitarianism

Many signals point to the seeming inevitability of multiple humanitarian crises happening simultaneously. The signals speak to the tensions between complex, intertwined, global crisis, and the role of humanitarian agencies within this shifting paradigm. -This is occurring against a backdrop of shrinking humanitarian space as well as the nexus between humanitarian and development aid.

Does the work of humanitarian aid need to be more expansive to consider interconnected changes? Can we position aid within the broader transformational and evolutionary systems we exist in, and therefore how do we redesign aid supply, finance and logistics systems, as well as front end programming to complement shifts to circular economies and inclusive growth? Are siloed responses still appropriate for this level of converging of complexity, or might we need to shift to systems-based responses as a way to mitigate against (or influence) what we already see cascading? And if so, how do we do this?

Will this help rebuild our trust, our legitimacy with those we serve and with those whom we are inter-connected? Or is just surviving as an institution as we are currently enough?

Insight #2: Implications before solutions

As we are designing scenario and contingency planning to firefight the immediacy of the problems in front of us, we also need more robust implications analysis that considers the first (immediate) levels of impact, and also the second order (mid term) and third order (long term) impacts. This pushes us to consider the

interconnectedness of risks, highlights potential blindspots we haven't considered and provides a structured approach to *how* this might lead to future structural ecosystem transformations. Important in this analysis is to also consider *in what ways* current paradigms and models are not fit for this future normal. It stops us from merely designing reactive solutions, and instead, brings to the front difficult decisions we might need to make, that we might have previously thought were not needed. How then might we continue to draw on observed strategic risks (the immediate future) as well strategic reimaginings (of what is a future perceived risk) to ensure our services are of value and mitigate harm?

Insight #3: Compasses over maps

The capacity to respond to #newnormals requires a *multitudinal* transformation. It is not merely about reframing or redesigning our programs and services to respond to the externalities. It also requires a rigorous reframe of our internal structures and models - including decision making, risk appetite, financing, collaborations, culture and agility. How can we ensure that we are not just prioritising investments and programming into short term horizons that might prevent us from seeing longer-term risk signals?

Insight #4: Pluralism and collective intelligence

Listening and seeking data from a wider set of perspectives that might be outside the normal circles of 'evidence' is a much needed emerging, participatory lever for decision making. Though the clusters of data highlighted in this initiative might already seem familiar, institutional cognitive bias often limits action to what is within mandate or influence, or easily solvable. The **pluralism** of a wider range of 'data gathering' strengthens our collective intelligence, highlights bias, identifies concentrations of issues and encourages greater collaboration between agencies to inspire a larger ambition for holistic planning. Capacities for institutions to consider both what is immediately relevant and what might not seem to be, is the basis for 'anti-fragility' - it stops us from having blinkers on. There is power when multiple people across multiple agencies and geographies are saying the same things - could this be the lever needed then for significant change? Will we opt for a 'Larger Us'² approach?

² <https://www.longcrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-19-and-the-Long-Crisis-of-Globalisation-17May20.pdf>

Insight #5: Non-binary institutional innovation and leadership

Our collective futures are complex and uncertain. Leadership and institutional styles and structures of the past might not be what is needed for our futures.

What then might be the types and styles of leadership needed to guide us forward? What are the different forms of thinking leadership need to embrace? Whose voices should they listen to? How do we sustain brave leadership through uncharted territories and nurture values of empathy, innovation and adaptive leadership?

The changes that our institutions have had to make to respond to COVID-19 also demonstrate that we *can* change and do it quickly. It defeats previous arguments that some structural changes were too hard - the shifts that we have had to make show that good ideas, fast pivots, greater risk taking, is not only possible, but can be implemented with agility. How do we sustain these institution innovations beyond this moment of crisis? How do we sustain the energy and appetite to test new things?

The signals reflect multiple risks and concerns that indicate merely embracing new forms of transformation and skills (whether digital or otherwise) is not a panacea. We have a responsibility to mitigate and not exacerbate past inequalities. This requires a much broader understanding of ethics, culture, risks and rights. How do we augment our people with future fit skills, attitudes and behaviours that can help make this transition?

It also nudges different discussions around institutional structures of the future. The upsurge of localised responses strengthens the need for localisation, beyond binary options of either centralised or decentralised. Could the institutional structures of the future be networked nodes with flattened access and decision making, whilst maintaining accountability? How can we shift our back office bureaucracy so that it helps enhance agility in complex times, rather than hinder it?

Call to action

This initiative demonstrated a keen interest for humanitarians to be *curators of the possible* rather than merely reactors to the inevitable. The simple process of imagining what could be, to collectively talk through joint uncertainties amplified commonality in ideas, and a hunger to do something different. Sustaining this hunger is integral - at a time when our sector is calling for much needed reform. Leveraging this will help build cross-agency intelligence, analysis and creativity.

Feedback and consultation lead to two recommendations:

1. Renew this initiative in a more structured manner at mid-year to build and iterate from this initial data set, identify other immediate changes that have occurred and what has been sustained. Importantly, the second round of this initiative will evolve from just signals gathering to broad-based sensemaking and analysis.
2. Use the findings of this initiative to nudge potential significant shifts that might be needed, including how to be ready for these forms of transformation. Some ideas generated through this initiative could be used as nudges of experimentation between and among agencies.

Annex

Possible #newnormals of Humanitarian Action

12 themes

1. Will fear or collaboration win the game?

In front of the need to contain COVID-19 a security at all cost narrative has been installed by some. War metaphors used to describe the challenges we are facing are compelling but also dangerous. While the rhetoric could serve to unite efforts, it also allows re-enforcing law, restricting rights, increasing control or fuelling tensions. At a time in which collaboration between states seems to be struggling (as shown by EU difficulties to agree in a unified response), some governments have seen it as an opportunity to strengthen their political agendas and advance their objectives in ways that may aggravate domestic or international crises". An increasing number of signs of authoritarianism, nationalisms, reinforcement of immigration law and restrictions of permits and loss of democracy principles have been observed.

During COVID-19 times, signs of increased geopolitical friction have also emerged, exacerbating existing great-power tensions. How China has handled coronavirus pandemic—inside and outside the country—has affected perceptions of China among countries. While their expertise in C19 has been recognized and used by China to offer support globally, it has alerted those that see China's increase of predominance as threatening (Trump's accused WHO of being "China-centric and blames China for the disease). It has also raised China's neighbours' concerns of facing a belligerent post-pandemic Beijing and how this might shape future policy toward China or the regional policy landscape more broadly.

In a COVID-19 influenced geopolitical landscape, will countries choose to come together to defeat COVID-19 or will each one stand apart to better protect themselves? Will different forms of authoritarianism gain space or will the systems that preserve rights and promote cooperation? Will power dynamics be affected and political disputes exacerbate? How will COVID-19 shape the multilateral order that will emerge? What role can humanitarian agencies play in influencing the geopolitical landscape?

2. The era of reformed, sustainable economies

Lockdown measures around the world are causing the halting of many businesses and commercial exchanges. The economic hit could be devastating and will particularly affect low and middle income countries, where workers in informal employment or with limited access to social protection face a high risk of falling into poverty. The impact of this global recession is multifaceted - from a sudden decline in remittances on which many countries rely as a source of income, to inflated price of essential commodities such as rice, to a drop in local currencies value, to changing export practices for protecting stocks.

There are rising concerns that this could cause a domino effect of multiple humanitarian crises simultaneously. Humanitarian funding is expected to be significantly decreased to compensate for economic loss. **With limited resources available to cover for larger needs, humanitarian organizations are questioning their ways of working and responses.** The crises could also spur a new form of globalization for the 21st century. New practices are already emerging, with people rediscovering old ways of recycling, making and questioning their consumption habits. A structural shift in our relationship with the environment could lead to restoring balance between economic growth and impacts of climate change.

Will this pandemic be an opportunity to reform economics in a sustainable way? Or will states try to relaunch their economy full-speed by relaxing environmental rules? Will it make us rethink globalization and different models of growth, or will we rush back to our old models? Would humanitarian aid supply chains also need to be redesigned with principles of sustainable economics?

3. Tyranny of inequality

COVID-19 is laying bare socio-economic inequalities and indications point to further exacerbation in the near future. The pandemic isn't an equalizer - communities of colour, migrant workers, the uninsured, the poor and the less mobile are experiencing far more unequitable, disparate impacts. Low-income settlements and places of detention are not designed with robust health systems and those that reside within them are at high risk. Furthermore, social distancing measures or social safety nets policies are not designed for the almost billion people that live in urban slums. It has flared existing tensions, scapegoating minoritized groups, significantly increased intimate partner violence and reversing gains made on other diseases, particularly diseases of poverty (malaria/TB). War metaphors has spurred new forms of nationalism.

The first policy recommendations for COVID-19 took a one-size-fit-all approach, built on the characteristics of industrialized, wealthier societies. Low to middle income contexts were impacted much more adversely, increasing poverty and mortality among the poor. It missed groups that did not fall within existing social protection mechanisms and thus fell through the cracks of COVID-19 initial responses.

*In this complex time, **how do we ensure that our humanitarian programming responses do not exacerbate past inequalities** because we didn't pay attention to this? How do we ensure that our responses are not merely extrapolated thinking from one context to another and how do we shift away from siloed programming? Do we need much sharper political analysis, alliance building and courage? Do we need a broader systems approach to our institutions and our work? How will we achieve that?*

4. Digital maelstrom and surveillance health

Technology in the time of COVID-19 has deeply changed the way we live through new ways of working, shopping, socializing, and providing healthcare. There has been an explosion of the development of digital apps, tools, dashboards, and IoTs. These are already fundamentally changing the way businesses will operate now and into the future- supply chains will be local rather than global, and online shopping surpassing storefronts. It is transforming the ways in which healthcare will be provided: countries put telemedicine on the fast track to monitor patients without having them risk going out. Robots have become de facto assistants in healthcare institutions being impervious to infections; allowing remote consultations and even to keep the elderly connected to loved ones.

We know though that digital disruptions are not new. **There is a long history of concerns and debates on digital privacy and digital rights.** However, the scope and speed of new or expanded digital technologies to address COVID-19 is staggering. Governments worldwide are also using digital technologies and big data analytics to address the COVID-19 pandemic - sometimes with high potential for increased general surveillance. Tracing apps in particular may help reduce the spreading of the virus - often at the expense of privacy. The line between individual freedoms and the good of the general public is not straightforward, and neither are individuals' feelings about privacy versus public health. The digital divide is at risk of expanding the chasm between those who have and those who do not have access to digital infrastructure and connectivity. Even cheap solutions may be out of reach to many. Increased reliance on digital tools to monitor the spread of disease raises serious questions about how to prevent governments from using those same tools to track individuals for other purposes after a health crisis has subsided. Or will data be considered the oil of the 21st century.

Balancing the demands of public health with privacy rights will require flexibility of privacy safeguards, including questions such as: What measures can be taken to protect user data and ensure government (and private sector) tracking doesn't become the new normal? How can we provide safe places for survivors of violence in an age of lockdown and possibly increased surveillance? As health and humanitarian actors come into closer working relationships with police authorities for contact tracing and the isolation of people potentially exposed to the virus, the risks of negative perceptions around neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian may increase. What does reinforcing ethical and principled action look like, and what is the best way to join voices to highlight the limitations and potential for breaches of digital tools? Is the best course of action to increase advocacy with digital

governance platforms and in partnership with a wider range of actors to pre-emptively mitigate these risks? **Some digital-health leaders emphasize that health vs. privacy is a false choice and that we must ensure that the digital tools we use have robust data-governance provisions from the beginning. If not, rights we surrender during this crisis might prove impossible to regain after it's over.**

5. Emerging forms of resources

The World Food Program (WFP) warns risk of COVID-19 set to almost double acute hunger by the end of 2020 ('hunger pandemic') and as a consequence, humanitarian institutions will face massive challenges of dealing with multiple global crises taking place simultaneously. To date, studies indicate that rural communities that are practicing agriculture are coping far better with the pandemic and localized agri-food systems (as opposed to industrial farming) is one of the sectors to be least affected. Adapting to minor and larger crises by using new and innovative ways to cope with these is likely to become a useful skill in the future. People might opt to move away from exaggerated forms of consumerism and lean towards a more artisan and do-it-yourself lifestyle in order to make the best use of the limited resources at hand.

Variables like population density, infrastructures and health systems are interrelated to produce significant vulnerabilities or violent geographies in urban settings. One of the more crucial resources to survival, dignity and building resilience may be access to energy. It is seen as an enabling resource for a wide range of essential services such as electricity for medical assistance, communication, access to information, business continuity but also energy for cooking in times of restricted movement.

With this in mind, should energy be considered peripheral or integral to humanitarian response? Beyond that, could the COVID-19 crisis offer an opportunity to consider a new energy order on a global scale to enable the energy transition in a sustainable way? Should humanitarian institutions give more importance to the promotion of rural livelihoods and access to land for agricultural activities as an integral part of the humanitarian response to assure food security in crises? Can humanitarians capitalize on approaches such as 'circular economy' and potentials associated with repairing, repurposing and recycling cultures? Shall there be a drastic rethinking of urban planning and services to enable infrastructural upgrading of essential services and resources?

6. Information as currency

Information has gained new currency in the COVID-19 era. Current technology allows democratization of information without fact-checking. Highly popular voices can reach and influence large audiences with speculative - rather than factual- content. Though it is recognised that some forms of misinformation are based on genuine ignorance or the need to reassure panicked populations, some are deliberate disinformation and can have negative impacts on many levels. From spreading harmful health advice or wild conspiracy theories, to stigmatizing certain people and groups, to influencing electorate and decision makers. Humanitarian organizations or the populations we work with might also be subject to stigmatization and hate speech. The pandemic calls for a fundamental rethink of how we use our communication tools. For humanitarian organizations, it means adapting messaging and approaches to different profiles of people to ensure effective communications to build/maintain trust from the distance, when we are used to being able to do it face-to-face.

Will COVID-19 accelerate the transition towards more effective two-ways communication models between affected populations and the agencies? How do we combat false or poor information and ensure robust and data-driven decision making processes?

7. Conflict and deep societal questioning

COVID-19 has the is likely to wreak havoc in fragile states, trigger widespread unrest and severely test international crisis management systems. COVID-19 is likely to generate multiple global crises, often taking place simultaneously. From food insecurity to rising tensions in cyber-security to armed groups, criminal actors and gangs taking advantage of power vacuums, the list is long. In countries where state capacity has become either severely diminished or non-existent, the consequences of COVID-19 could be transformational, expanding the reach of militias, terrorists, and other armed sub-state actors who have filled governance voids to provide services to local communities, in some cases combining this with brutal subjugation. For the first time in 75 years the UN issued a global peace fire request but after a promising start, it seems little or sustained peace has come of it. We face a landscape of access limitations, of violence against healthcare workers, and potential for prolonging conflict and new conflict.

These complexities seem to have spurred an almost existential questioning in all of us. Broader than our institutional or technical roles - **there is recognition that the world and the societies we inhabit are changing around us**. Our social contract - how we look at and treat each other, how we interact and make decisions is changing. How we connect physically and virtually is transforming. We see opportunities for 'mass flourishing' - where people and communities are coming together to help each other out, and to help those being missed by social care programs. But inversely, we also see a spreading of fear - of an increase in the marginalisation and social stigma.

*Against these possible scenarios, **humanitarian actors will be tested. What new skills and capacity will require scaling** such as legal support, detention monitoring and health support, psychosocial support and diplomatic capacity? How might humanitarian institutions go beyond the firefighting of today to try to better understand and be ready for the cascade of catastrophes that this might unleash?*

8. A cry for leadership and transformed institutions

There is a general perception of a lack of political leadership on a global scale including a breakdown of leadership from world powers. Some countries have politicized the virus, which at times has included implications for some of our own institutions. With a stronger focus on the role of international institutions, leadership will come under scrutiny from outside as well as within. Whilst individuals and communities have mixed perceptions of government responses, leadership of humanitarian institutions have a strong role to play in taking a step back and questioning the roles of their institutions, driving change based on recognised need for transformation, rather than merely seeking to prove relevance.

COVID-19 has also unearthed how unprepared many institutions have been, leaving many institutions facing operational and financial difficulties. This has led many to question the roles that their institutions play, often with links to a broader set of uncertainties such as the climate crisis, the economic crisis, the geopolitical landscape, technology, mobility restrictions, workforce duty of care, as well as leadership. **It has become clear that institutional barriers and silos are no longer acceptable, working across institutions has to be increasingly prevalent**. There is a space for a conversation around how we could change, but also that returning to business as usual is not an option, even if there were funding and ability to do so at the scale required to meet new challenges.

Are the following themes therefore some key considerations for our institutions? (1) Can we embrace new ways of working particularly around a digital transformation that have been outlined in the 4th Industrial Revolution? (2) Do we need a new institutional design completely? One that is less top-down, less Western, more locally-led, accelerating reform and change, enhancing national capacity and meaningful localisation? (3) Do we need to rethink our internal systems so that they respond to a world of increased complexity? Is this the opportunity we needed for a more expansive role in a post-COVID world? What are the new leadership traits that are needed in these complex times, rather than out-of-date approaches that seek to protect old roles and ways of working? Are traits of empathy, innovation, empowerment, female leadership, customer and data centric leadership what will be needed to guide us through this next decade?

9. Opportunity for good

COVID-19 has proven that individuals can change for the better. We can have positive impacts on the environment, we can change our consumption patterns - if we want to. Governments have taken lessons from the COVID-19 crisis that health services and economic capability are interconnected. Furthermore, the pandemic has forced governments to collaborate for common solutions and invest in research and development for a cure. The new narrative must be to ensure affordable drugs and vaccines for all, leaving no one behind. Facing this increasing need of spending domestically, states might be less inclined to intervene/interfere with conflicts outside their borders. A reduced military presence/interference abroad might be conducive to peace and reconciliation in conflict areas.

For humanitarian aid, **COVID-19 should enhance an inter-agency collective intelligence – for resilient futures in the making**. Bringing together collective intelligence could avoid continuing to work in silos. Humanitarian organizations can bridge and connect the conversation about sickness and health between societies and contexts so that it becomes inclusive, and not occupied by “first world” medical issues. This can be used to extend empathy, solidarity and support to others who are sick, who have always been sick well before COVID-19 and didn't have access to testing, drugs or hospital care. Roles/professions vital to humanitarian work that have previously operated under obscurity are being amplified. More lay people, clinicians and allied professionals, and politicians are gaining an understanding of basic epidemiological principles, infection control theory and social determinants of health. It has led to technological innovations in supply management, in protective equipment and potential promising diagnostic tools.

How can the benefits be maximized of this broader societal awakening to communicable disease control, public health, and the social and environmental determinants of health? Has this crisis allowed for a radical re-imagining of resources in how aid organizations conceive of their backend in terms of HR, finance and supply? Has the current situation led to better communication, collaboration and coordination of response and actions?

10. New relationship goals with the planet?

The COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as an opportunity as well as a risk to planetary health. Climate change sceptics get a glimpse of real-time observation of positive changes on the environmental systems if certain actions are taken on a large scale. Such observations have been made with regards to the air quality in cities under lock-down. No country is immune from global threats and therefore the same solidarity from countries that we're seeing during the pandemic is needed for the global climate crisis. The world is slowly understanding the symbiotic nature of climate, environment, and (human) health. Studies show that the way the planet and its ecosystems are treated, has an impact on disease outbreaks; habitat destructions have often been the main cause of pandemics. Further, people are experiencing impacts of diseases in different ways depending on the environmental conditions they live in: those living in deteriorating environmental conditions are more likely to suffer more intensely from disease outbreaks. One example in the past were SARS patients coming from areas of high air pollution were more likely to die from the disease than others; similar findings related to air pollution were made with COVID-19. Due to (mostly) single-use protective gear and medical equipment, which are being produced in billions, the world has seen a rise in plastic pollution related to COVID-19. There is an imminent risk that the pandemic is stalling the climate change momentum. Why has the global climate crisis not seen the same sense of urgency as COVID-19? The weaker the global response in climate, the higher the price that vulnerable populations will pay.

This is an opportune moment to put bold changes in place, ranging from a greener operational response to the reduction of environmental footprint of institutions (e.g. stricter mission travel policies); backed by a data driven approach.

Should humanitarian teams responding to a crisis view the physical environment and what their response does to it as a critical aspect within the operational design ('environment centered design')? Will humanitarians be able to use the current momentum as a hook to address climate and environment related challenges?

11. Rethinking responses

COVID-19 could stay as a new normal communicable disease. Hope to contain the pandemic is placed in vaccine developments, and yet this is a multi-year task that will take time. Being overly optimistic about the efficacy of a future vaccine may provoke shorter term decision horizons in political and health responses with the consequences it implies. Signals emerge around the need to rethink how the global epidemic response should work and who should be involved. In some countries governments have included humanists and ethical perspectives to help them navigate the delicate ethical balancing act of reopening society while safeguarding the health of the public. And yet, “One-size-fits-all” approach to COVID-19 may not serve all and could have lethal consequences. During the COVID-19 crisis, lock-down measures, travel restrictions and supply chains disruptions are affecting the provision of humanitarian aid. And communities affected by COVID-19 and/or other humanitarian crises have reacted to “get the job done”. Refugees have been asked to do more community work, more distributions and sensitization impacting relationships between beneficiaries” and humanitarian workers. They may have realized that humanitarians are not always there when needed. **COVID-19 has challenged our social contract, inspiring new forms of hyper-local collaboration, supporting people where national policies have failed to care for them.**

How long will COVID-19 pandemic dominate the world? Will it be contained or will it stay as a communicable disease forever with ongoing repeated ‘waves’?. Will it very differently affect countries depending on its health systems capacity?. How other critical humanitarian & global health needs will be affected?. What will be the future global epidemic response system?

12. Erosion of trust

People are actively monitoring, judging, supporting or condemning their governments’ COVID-19 response. It points to the exacerbation of the climate of trust across authority figures. Governments are not the only ones under scrutiny from civil society and the mistrust extends to mandated organizations: NGOs, UN System amongst others. Certain communities fear that aid workers travelling to isolated areas could bring the coronavirus with them and are closing their doors to humanitarian aid. This negative perception could be exacerbated after the health crisis, depending on the severity of its side-effects on socio-economic and political equilibrium. If humanitarians are viewed as part of the problem, it will impede access and our ability to work in safety.

The situation also presents an opportunity for humanitarian actors to renew their commitment and relevance to assisting populations in need, enhance agility, working in collaboration with communities and each other.

Will the current crisis completely erode trust in humanitarian actors? Or will humanitarian organizations use this opportunity to rebuild trust in themselves through transparency, inclusive communication and more radical forms of collaboration?

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