

IIMHL & IIDL Leadership Briefing XLIII

Covid-19 and the Sustainable Development Goals – A framework for COVID-19 action for all countries?

Janet Peters

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“It’s really hard to influence the rest of the world unless you (the UK) leads by example¹”.

“Some advocated a Covid-19 recovery plan “structured around the goals”, adding that “it’s the closest thing we’ve got to a global strategy [and] everyone is agreed on it²”

All is interconnected...rather than solely focusing on Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) in the Covid-19 recovery: “... the national and international COVID-19 response must also focus on gender equality, human rights, economic empowerment and education. Emerging evidence and country case studies suggests that interconnectivity across the SDGs is critical to controlling the COVID-19 pandemic and its secondary impacts, particularly for marginalised communities³”

A report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development: Building Back Better- The SDGs as a roadmap for recovery

November 2020

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the closest thing to a global strategy that 193 governments have agreed.

There are (SDGs): 17 goals, with 169 associated targets, to be achieved by 2030⁴. While progress towards achieving the SDGs has been threatened by the Covid-19 pandemic, the need to ‘re-set’ from its effects offer an opportunity to ensure delivery

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ecd042b27d0ac66b8a694bb/t/5f5f1ea982f5d20704c4d301/1600069295538/Building+Back+Better+-+The+SDGs+as+a+roadmap+for+recovery+-+Full+report.pdf> Chris Southworth, oral evidence session, 10 August 2020 P.9

² Ibid. p.26

³ Ibid. p.26

⁴ <https://www.appg-globalgoals.org/what-are-the-sdgs>

of the SDGs are a global priority. Prioritising key areas of economic and sustainable development will support and enable the achievement of the SDGs, especially if the leave no one behind principle is integrated into these approaches.

The next decade is a crucial one to achieve the SDGs and leave no one behind. The recommendations in this report show how the UK Government can play its part in integrating this framework into activities in the UK and internationally, providing a roadmap to build back better after the Covid-19 pandemic and offering a prosperous, resilient future for all.

The SDGs now offer a 'ready-made' roadmap to recovery. They are also the closest thing to a global strategy that 193 governments have agreed. While progress towards achieving the SDGs has been threatened by the Covid-19 pandemic, the need to 'reset' from its effects offer an opportunity to ensure delivery of the SDGs are a global priority. Prioritising key areas of economic and sustainable development will support and enable the achievement of the SDGs, especially if the leave no one behind principle is integrated into these approaches. The following are the key priorities for the UK Government based on the evidence we received:

- Economic development
- Sustainable development
- Build back better
- How to deliver the SDGs

Our report demonstrates the wide-ranging impact of Covid-19 across SDG areas, with the pandemic affecting everything from health to conflict, poverty to gender equality and beyond. Below, we summarise evidence we received on the impact of Covid-19 on different SDGs.

Health and Water

The health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, both direct and indirect, threaten progress towards achieving Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing). The virus has also highlighted existing problems in delivering Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation).

Economy and Poverty

The disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is also having a debilitating economic impact across the world, with consequent impacts on levels of poverty, presenting particular challenges for delivering Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequality).

Food and Nutrition

The economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic have exacerbated the challenges in achieving Goal 2 (Zero Hunger).

Education

Education has been interrupted across the world following the implementation of school closures to control the spread of the virus. At the peak of the outbreak in April 2020, 194 nations had country-wide school closures, with 91 per cent of the world's children being out of school. These closures are having a profound effect on progress towards Goal 4 (Quality Education), which we were told "has never been in greater jeopardy".

Climate Change and the Environment

The need for the global community to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic threatens to distract from the equally pressing need to take action on climate change, in line with Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and Goal 13 (Climate Action), and to protect the environment, in line with Goal 14 (Life Below Water) and Goal 15 (Life On Land).

Gender Equality

Progress towards Goal 5 (Gender Equality) has been affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. Whilst it was noted that the virus is taking the lives of more men than women, women are bearing the brunt of the secondary impacts of the pandemic, with Dinah Musindarwezo of Womankind Worldwide stating that "Covid-19 has deepened gender inequalities in almost all areas affecting women's rights."

Institutional Trust & Conflict

The impact of Covid-19 is decreasing trust in state institutions and increasing conflict situations, threatening progress towards Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

International development assistance & global humanitarian progress

The impact of Covid-19 is decreasing trust in state institutions and increasing conflict situations, threatening progress towards Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Concern about the impact of Covid-19 on levels of official development assistance (ODA) and global humanitarian progress was also widespread, with many worried that Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) will be undermined.

Particularly impacted groups

As well as receiving evidence on the SDGs being most affected by Covid-19, we were also told about specific groups that have been more impacted by the consequences of the virus. Marginalised groups are among the most affected, imperilling the prospects of achieving Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Future Action

The report explored in more detail the evidence we received on action the UK Government must take on specific SDGs. Over the course of our inquiry, a number

of key sectoral recommendations emerged as to how the UK Government can build back better using the SDGs. We have outlined specific recommendations in each section below and provided our overarching recommendations for the Government in the conclusion.

One example is given of one area of need “Global Public Health” with the recommendations to government.

Improving global public health

The Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the importance of increased attention on Goal 3 (Global Health and Wellbeing) and related goals including Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) and Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), as well as placing an emphasis on the leave no one behind principle across these goals

Recommendations to the Government

1. Work with international partners to ensure that a Covid-19 vaccine and any effective treatments, if and when approved, are available to all as fast as possible and free of charge.
2. Commit to maintaining current ODA for non-Covid-19 health programmes and supporting low-income countries to develop resilient public health systems and universal health coverage.
3. Invest and encourage wider investment in WASH facilities in schools and communities that do not already have adequate provision in order to help prevent further Covid-19 outbreaks, ensuring the principle of leave no one behind guides this support.
4. Invest in global health education programmes on nutrition and take an active role in driving progress at the next Nutrition for Growth summit.

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