

Headline: Converging crises, synergistic solutions

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Almost a year after the then-novel coronavirus epidemic broke out in Wuhan, China to become the COVID-19 pandemic of today, we are still hunkering down for our safety and doing our best to emerge out of this crisis. But there's a reason to be hopeful, as science is moving at an unparalleled speed to deliver safe and effective vaccines to the world.

We hope this is also the case for another global health crisis—climate change. With the recent release of the Lancet report that contains the most troubling indicators thus far on the detrimental effects of climate change on the survival, health, and well-being of people (especially the most vulnerable populations), and the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement which is supposed to hold countries to account in terms of global temperature rise and carbon emissions, the global health community is sounding the alarm anew for bold and swift actions against climate change in the time of COVID-19.

At this pivotal moment, one fundamental question should be asked: If we can display the same level of global solidarity and humanitarian commitment to putting an end to the pandemic, why can't we do the same for climate change, a problem that preceded and will surely outlast COVID-19?

COVID-19 and climate change form a converging crises—two issues that should not be treated separately. We can't wait for COVID-19 to end to start and continue with our climate actions. We should address the converging crises simultaneously. This cannot be negotiated or postponed.

As we transition from COVID-19 response to recovery, we have to learn the good practices from successful COVID-19 responses in different parts of the world: active surveillance, strategic risk communication, health promotion, upgrading of health human resources and infrastructure, harnessing technology, cross-sectoral collaboration, people engagement, political will.

These are the same solutions needed to adapt to and be prepared for the health impacts of climate change. We must strengthen health systems guided by these best practices.

But to really deal with the climate change issue head-on, it is imperative to reduce carbon emissions substantially and keep global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Otherwise, our health and that of our only planet will be jeopardized.

We can all do our part as we incorporate healthy and green actions in our recovery from COVID-19. The World Health Organization manifesto prescribes the following actions: 1. Protecting and preserving nature. 2. Investing in essential services, from water and sanitation to clean energy in health care facilities. 3. Ensuring a quick healthy energy transition. 4. Promoting healthy and sustainable food systems. 5. Building healthy, livable cities. 6. Stopping the use of taxpayer money to fund pollution.

These actions, if done now as we further open our economies and when sustained in the long term, can help flatten the climate curve.

Through multi-sectoral and international cooperation, there is a great opportunity before us today that should not be missed if we are to build sustainable economies and protect the health and

well-being of people better in the near and far futures.

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