BUILD BACK BETTER: GLOBAL SOLIDARITY FOR A JUST RECOVERY

“This is the right time to encourage a new imagination of what is possible… uniting the entire human family in the search for sustainable and comprehensive development”

Pope Francis

The Covid-19 crisis highlights how interconnected we are globally, and how increasingly vulnerable we are to systemic shocks and risks. The disparities in the impact of Covid-19 on racial and ethnic minorities, indigenous groups and women are signifiers of deeply rooted inequality and the crisis exposes inequality in its starkest terms, within and between countries, with the most vulnerable people hardest hit.

The pandemic has also highlighted structural failures in our existing economic, political and social systems that have created the intersecting global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, food insecurity and conflict, displacement and deepening inequality. These crises are a result of political choices over decades, along with unregulated corporate power, that have undermined human rights and the protection of the environment.

While the pandemic is still evolving and some of the worst impacts may be yet to come, the UN have urged governments to “build back better” in the recovery period to create more sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies. The Sustainable Development Goals offer a vision of a future where meeting a set of economic, political and social goals ensure that no-one is left behind. Even before the impacts of Covid-19 international progress was off-track for their delivery. Building back better is therefore not a return to business as usual. Rather we must put key principles of a just recovery into action to truly deliver the world we want.

To avoid deepening inequality and poverty it is imperative that poorer countries are not plunged into a new debt crisis from financing the Covid-19 response. Similarly, when it comes to use of public resources for bailouts, the mistakes of the last financial crash where the approach was often “socializing the losses and privatizing the gains” must not be repeated. Governments should ensure that public financial support provided to firms in order to combat the economic effects of COVID-19 is conditional upon adherence to international standards of responsible business conduct and the Paris Agreement, in order to ensure the transition to more sustainable business models and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals prioritizing those furthest behind first.
Globally billions of dollars are being injected into the economy through bailouts, stimulus packages, and quantitative easing. Decision-making at all levels is setting the framework for how the world recovers. To truly build back better, current global power structures need to be transformed and decision-making should be underpinned by principles for a just and environmental sustainable recovery. Drawing on our organizational values, Trócaire identifies the following as key guiding principles of global solidarity for building back better:

- **Human rights and gender equality:** Covid-19 has impacted a broad spectrum of human rights and requires a human rights response whereby states and corporations must meet their obligations to respect, protect and promote human rights. The current crisis has disproportionately affected women and the response should promote women's human rights, empowerment and inclusion in decision-making.

- **Anti-racism:** The UN has expressed deep concern at the stigmatization, xenophobia, racism and discrimination, surfacing in the COVID-19 pandemic in many parts of the world. Indigenous communities often stand at the front lines of the protection of our environment and biodiversity and are being attacked and killed in the context of racist institutions that undermine their rights, including the right to free, prior and informed consent. Any sustainable recovery from Covid-19 requires addressing racism, at the institutional and individual levels.

- **Participation and community-led approaches:** Human rights defenders are under attack and some governments have used Covid-19 as a way to restrict civil society space and retain power. Participation in public life by rights holders and civil society is a fundamental principle and improves the efficacy of political systems and policy development and implementation. Community-led responses to critical issues often point the way to sustainable and equitable solutions and should be supported as a priority.

- **Global Solidarity:** Covid-19 has demonstrated how interdependent we are. A global pandemic requires global solutions. As the UNSG António Guterres states “the world is only as strong as its weakest health system.” States should show solidarity through much needed development assistance, and ensure that this is not undermined by simultaneously demanding debt repayment. States should also work to protect multilateralism which threatened in the current political context. Strong, coherent leadership is needed to fulfil the sustainable development goals for all.

- **Environmental sustainability:** This decade has been identified as the hottest on record – the scale of action needed to halve global emissions and keep within the 1.5°C limit is unprecedented. We are in a climate and biodiversity emergency and must act accordingly.
1. ODA: HUMANITARIAN, FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

“There is a natural tendency in the face of crisis to take care of one’s own first. But true leadership understands that there are times to think big and more generously.”
Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General

“We could be facing multiple famines of biblical proportions within a short few months”
David Beasley, head of the World Food Programme

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbates already historically high levels of existing humanitarian need and threatens to generate additional humanitarian crises of unprecedented magnitude. The costs of tackling Covid-19 require significant increases in humanitarian funding. A World Food Programme, and warned we could be facing “multiple famines”. As a result, the FAO’s humanitarian response to Covid-19 is calling for an additional Overall humanitarian needs including a Covid-19 response in 2020 requiring $37.27 billion with only 21.5% of that amount currently funded in the first 6 months of the year.

There is high degree of political and public support for Official Development Assistance (ODA) in Ireland with surveys suggesting 93% Irish people believe that solidarity with people in developing countries is important. Trócaire welcome the role that political representatives played in seeking to protect the ODA budget during the last financial crisis and have welcomed the increases of recent years towards the target of 0.7% of GNI. Recently the OECD Development Assistance Committee conducted a peer review of Irish Aid and again confirmed that Ireland is “an excellent humanitarian partner.”

As we face into a period of unprecedented humanitarian need it is crucial that we maintain global solidarity and ensure no cuts to ODA, which would severely hit the most vulnerable communities. We urge all Irish political representatives to work towards reaching the historic UN ODA target of 0.7% of GNI as committed to in the Programme for Government, and to also ensure climate finance allocations will increase, alongside increases in overall ODA in the lifetime of the government.

The current global health crisis is already generating or exacerbating critical situations in food systems at local, national and global levels. Immediate actions to maintain food access and security are necessary, including social protection.
measures and emergency food assistance that protect the most vulnerable, including infants and children, the elderly, people with disabilities and those living in poverty.

Supporting family farmers, small scale farmers, peasant farmers and rural workers through subsidies and flexible loan modalities will be critical. Industrial systems, based on intensive planting of monoculture crops, using genetically uniform commercial seeds and other costly external inputs are driving many farmers into debt and compromising the ability of many households to purchase food. They represent a form of integration that moves costs onto farmers, with input prices set by corporate suppliers and declining terms of trade for primary commodities resulting in stagnant or even falling farm-gate prices. Policy measures that protect urban market supply chains, particularly in net food importing countries, and that ensure farmers timely access to inputs and unhindered use of local seeds are crucial. Agriculture and food systems policies that deliver on the right to adequate food for all in a community led and sustainable manner are long overdue. The effects of the pandemic are compounded by pre-existing drivers of humanitarian needs such as conflict, climate change, environmental degradation, unsustainable food systems, human rights violations, poverty and inequality – including gender inequality and discrimination. To address humanitarian need these root causes need to be addressed. To avoid deepening inequality and poverty it is imperative that a new debt crisis does not result for poor countries as a result of financing for the Covid-19 response.

All Governments:

- Urgently and significantly increase humanitarian funding to ensure fully funded effective humanitarian response to Covid-19 without diverting funds from existing humanitarian need. Funding should prioritise localized humanitarian responses supporting local and national organisations particularly women led organisations.
- Work within the IMF, the World Bank, and other multilateral forums, for a full, coordinated cancellation of all bilateral, multilateral and private sovereign debt repayments due in 2020 and 2021, from low- and middle-income countries, and work for sufficient grant-based aid to ensure that no country in the Global South faces risk of debt crises because of Covid19.

Ireland:

- Protect the ODA budget line from cuts in Budget 2021 and work towards achieving the UN target of 0.7% of GNI untied ODA through the development of a multi annual plan.
- Maintain high quality, poverty reduction focused, untied aid, including civil society as key partner.

Northern Ireland

- Political representatives in NI urge the UK government to maintain a focus on poverty alleviation and social justice in its ODA, following the merger of the Department of International Development into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. ODA must have poverty reduction as its primary focus, adhering to the OECD Development Assistance Committee rules and the UK’s clear commitment to the ‘leave no one behind’.
2. TACKLING THE CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY EMERGENCY

“We are about to deploy enormous, gigantic fiscal stimulus and we can do it in a way that we tackle both crises at the same time… If our world is to come out of this [coronavirus] crisis more resilient, we must do everything in our power to make it a green recovery.”
Kristalina Georgieva, Chief Executive of the International Monetary Fund

“We need to make sure that we don’t come out of the lockdown and sleepwalk into a harmful “lock-in” of the obsolete, polluting technologies and outdated business models of the past century.”
Frans Timmermans, European Commission and Fatih Birol, International Energy Agency

Pandemics such as coronavirus are the result of the destruction of nature, according to leaders at the UN and WHO, who urge that legislation and trade deals are designed to contribute to rather than undermine a green and healthy recovery. Risks of viruses are amplified by enhanced human-wildlife interaction, which can be exacerbated by habitat destruction due to commercial agriculture, unchecked urbanization, deforestation, and land and resource grabs. The climate and biodiversity emergency has not only contributed to the emergence of pandemics, but without an urgent step change in the global response will dwarf the current pandemic. Its impact is particularly evident in an on-going food crisis that threatens the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in developing countries.

Developing nations face an estimated 75% of the cost of the climate crisis and over the past twenty years citizens in developing countries have died at a rate 7 times higher than in richer nations. These impacts are particularly unjust because while the poorest half of the world’s population are responsible for only 10% of carbon emissions, the richest 10 countries are responsible for 50% of all carbon emissions. Just 20 companies are responsible for over a third of cumulative global emissions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is clear that climate change ‘will worsen existing poverty and exacerbate inequalities, especially in relation to gender, age, race, class, caste, indigenous status and ability.’

The global lockdown led to decreases in daily greenhouse gas emissions, and could result in a 7% global reduction in 2020. However there is a significant risk of a return to increasing emissions from fossil fuels, energy, transport and agriculture without a deliberate investment in a green recovery.
Agriculture plays a particularly important role causing the climate, biodiversity and hunger crises and it has a key role to play in tackling them. The sector produces an estimated 21 percent of total global GHG emissions, with industrial agriculture mainly responsible for the sector’s emissions.

Building back better post Covid-19 must be based on a just transformation, which ensures investments, policies and priorities align the economy and society with the transition required to meet the objectives of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. This should include agroecology-sensitive policies to support local and diversified food systems, which are environmentally friendly, protecting biodiversity, territorial and community food self-sufficiency and promoting seasonal products and local varieties.

This means not only injecting liquidity into markets, but ensuring investment in long-term transitions towards climate neutrality and sustainable food systems that advance resource efficiency, resilience and social equity.

Short-term measures that ignore climate-related risks will have negative impacts, for example disproportionately benefiting high-polluting sectors, while green investments that lack human rights due diligence risks violating the rights of indigenous people and human rights defenders.

All Governments:
- Urgently step up climate ambition to close the emissions gap and meet the Paris Agreement targets.
- The EU should increase its 2030 climate target to at least 65% emissions reductions and ensure economic recovery measures put the transition to climate neutrality at their heart.
- Increase public agricultural research and investment to biodiverse production, value addition and local markets based on regenerative and agroecological principles.

Ireland:
- Ensure at least 8% annual reductions in emissions over the lifetime of the Government and pass the new Climate Action Bill within 100 days of the next Government taking office.
- Increase annual climate finance six-fold to deliver Ireland’s fair share of the Paris Agreement commitment alongside and additional to ODA targeted at interventions dedicated to impacts for women, including funding for grassroots and women’s organisations to empower local civil society.

Northern Ireland
- The NI Executive delivers on the commitments made in ‘New Decade, New Approach’ by urgently bringing forward legislation for a Climate Act. The act should have an integrated all-of-government approach to reducing emissions and ensure the transition to zero carbon is just, orderly and benefits the poorest and marginalised members of society. A Climate Act in NI should be an integral part of a just, green recovery.
- Promote a global transition to sustainable food systems in international standard setting bodies and institutions, including the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Committee on World Food Security and the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021.
3. PROMOTING CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BUSINESS

“The lessons from...COVID-19 is our dominant business model is unsustainable and must be transformed.”
Mary Robinson and Phil Bloomer

Civil society participation is the lifeblood of any healthy democracy and society.”
Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Covid-19 has impacted human rights, from health, work, education, access to food and shelter, to the right to freedom of assembly and of association. These impacts have compounded structural inequalities, particularly gender and racial inequality. The poorest, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people, those with precarious work, and those in service and caring professions (mostly women) have been hit hardest. Human rights must be at centre of the global response. A strong, independent, and diverse civil society and challenging unregulated corporate power - a key causal factor in climate change, the erosion of biodiversity, unsustainable food systems, and violations of human rights are critical to building back better.

In many countries civil society organisations and human rights defenders face extreme threats, ranging from killings, attacks, and gender-based violence, to judicial harassment and arbitrary detention. Attacks on women, particularly indigenous women are rising. Their activism has been met with online abuse, physical attacks, and sexist rhetoric by political leaders. Land, environmental and indigenous defenders, who protect biodiversity and natural resources for the common good - essential for preventing future pandemics, are also threatened. It has been alarming to see some governments using Covid-19 emergency measures as a means to target human rights defenders, government critics, minority groups and stifle civil society activity. Building back better will require the removal of restrictions in line with the subsidence of the public health threat, and state action to meet their obligations to ensure the rights and protection of human rights defenders and enabling civil society to operate and participate in shaping policy and practice.

Power has shifted from democratic governments and institutions towards powerful multinational entities threatening citizen participation and creating an accountability vacuum. Inadequate regulation of corporations has a direct impact on human
rights among Trócaire partners, including forced evictions of communities and appropriation of land, violation of rights of indigenous peoples to consent to developments, pollution of land, and destruction of livelihoods. Mining and agribusiness were the most dangerous sectors for human rights defenders in 2019.35 Despite the restrictions on human rights defenders in the context of Covid-19, corporate developments that are contested by local communities are continuing, and business interests are destroying the lands, territories and resources of indigenous peoples.36 As we face a global recession there is a danger that human rights and environmental standards will be lowered in order to attract investment.

There is a major gap in access to remedy for those affected by corporate harm and yet corporations can potentially claim against states who take measures in response to the pandemic, due to loss of expected profits. Governments should ensure a moratorium on investor state dispute settlement claims during the period of Covid-19 and an ongoing restriction on such claims related to measures taken during the pandemic, including those targeting health, economic, or social dimensions of the pandemic and its effects.37 There is clear evidence that voluntary mechanisms to regulate corporations are not effective, and that legally binding measures are needed to ensure all companies meet their human rights responsibilities.38

Ireland should develop mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence legislation, in line with other European countries and an upcoming EU legislative initiative. The Occupied Palestinian Territories Bill is also an opportunity to stop the importation of goods produced in the illegal Israeli settlements, and thus ensure businesses are not profiting from the violations of international humanitarian law. Despite the Covid-19 crisis, the relentless effort by Israel to illegally acquire as much Palestinian land as possible is only escalating with imminent plans for annexation. Leadership in response to violations of international humanitarian law is vital, including challenging the sustaining of settlements through importation of goods to Ireland.

All Governments:

• Ensure emergency measures to contain Covid-19 are carried out in accordance with human rights standards, on a temporary basis, in a way that is specific and proportionate to the public health risk.
• Ensure an enabling legal framework and a conducive political and public environment for diverse civil society to operate and to participate in policy-decisions, including a Covid-19 response.
• Ensure the protection of human rights defenders, including women, land, environmental and indigenous defenders, whose protection of nature is crucial to protection from future pandemics.

Ireland:

• Support a gender transformative UN Treaty to regulate the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises, with respect to human rights.
• Enact mandatory, gender responsive, human rights and environmental due diligence legislation.

Northern Ireland

• The NI Executive develops a national action plan on business and human rights for Northern Ireland.
• Political representatives in NI proactively urge the UK Government to support a gender transformative UN Treaty to regulate the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises, with respect to human rights.
• Political representatives in NI proactively urge the UK Government to adopt mandatory, gender responsive human rights and environmental due diligence legislation.

• Enact the Occupied Territories Bill to prevent the importation of good to illegal Israeli settlements.
Endnotes


10. 93% of Irish participants in the EU Barometer survey answered that helping people in developing countries was either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important, EU Narometer (2018) ‘EU citizens and development cooperation’, Ireland summary country analysis, https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/special/surveyKy/2202


22. IPCC (2018) Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C [online] Available at: https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/


36. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (18 May 2020) “COVID-19 is devastating indigenous communities worldwide, and it’s not only about health.”


38. The 2019 Corporate HumanRights Benchmark, assessed 200 of the largest publicly traded companies in the world on a set of human rights indicators. Industries with the highest risks of negative human rights impacts -agricultural products, apparel, extractives and ICT manufacturing reveal poor levels of implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The Chair said “That one quarter of companies score less than 10% and a full half of companies fail to meet any of the five basic criteria for human rights due diligence should alarm governments and investors.”

39. Corporate Human Rights Benchmark 2019 https://www. corporatebenchmark.org/ In February, the European Commission published the results of a study on due diligence requirements through the supply chain. The study shows that only one in three businesses in the EU are currently undertaking due diligence on human rights and environmental impacts. European Commission Press Release (24/02/2020) ‘Commission study shows the need for EU-level legislation on due diligence throughout the supply chain on human rights and environmental impacts’ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEX_20_3231