Managing multiple crises: Lessons from Covid-19

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Question

- *What have we learned through the Covid response about how countries are managing multiple crises, particularly where these crises are intersecting?*
- *What lessons are being drawn for government response, donors and development partners?*

Contents

1. Summary

The World is facing numerous, overlapping crises with the war in Ukraine exacerbating a global cost-of-living crisis, coupled with the lingering effects of Covid-19 and ongoing climate change impacts. After nearly three years of dealing with Covid-19, the world economy has been left in a fragile state and the ability of countries and people to deal with multiple, compounding issues has therefore also been eroding (UN, 2022, p. 2). Those that are most marginalised and least able to cope will likely be hit the hardest by these crises. This rapid review does not provide an in-depth discussion of these issues or the proposed solutions needed, but looks to learnings from managing the Covid-19 pandemic, especially where the pandemic overlapped with other crises, as well as the wider disaster risk and crisis management literature to gather insights into how these turbulent times and future crises can be navigated.

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed shortcomings in the dominant single-hazard disaster management approaches and crisis response, which are often short-term in nature (Donoghoe et al., 2022). Despite previous lessons learned, Governments still tend to think of hazards as one-off events with clear start and end dates, and providing an often narrow, technocratic response (Few et al., 2020). Systemic risks require systemic responses to build resilience (UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, 2021; Singh, 2021). Countries will need to build (further) resilience to adapt to and recover from compounding shocks, especially in developing and fragile states. This call for resilience is not new but is more pertinent than ever before (Brown, 2022). In particular, social protection tools have emerged as important instruments in responding to the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 as well as climate-related disasters, as these events overlap and exacerbate impacts in complex ways (Donoghoe et al., 2022, p. 3). However, building resilience and strengthening underlying systems takes a long time (Williams, 2020). Vulnerable people and marginalised groups will need to be put front and centre in responses, centring ethical and social justice considerations in the recovery (Diwakar & Shepherd, 2022). Conflict-sensitivity is also vital in responses to crises (Bousquet & Fernandez-Taranco, 2020). Social cohesion and trust will be key to building resilient communities (Jewett et al., 2021). The global infrastructure will need to be better able to deal with an increasingly ambiguous and "unruly" world, with the ability to make robust risk-informed decisions under increasing uncertainty being crucial (Leach et al., 2021). However, given the limitations that compounding crises have put on country's and people's abilities to cope and the scale of the ongoing layered crises, this review is realistic about how applicable many of the insights discussed will be in the short-term. Furthermore, as highlighted by the World Bank (2022a, p. i) "with differentiated country impacts, and a high degree of uncertainty, the current [crises] will require customized responses."

This rapid review draws on a range of academic and grey sources of information, including some opinion pieces. Given the breadth and complexity of the subject matter and the evolving nature of compound crises, this paper only provides a snapshot of discussions. Section 2 briefly examines what it means to be facing multiple crises and vulnerability. Section 3 explores some of the initial insights from managing Covid-19 and beyond. It draws out emerging lessons learned particularly around resilience building and approaches to management that may be relevant for dealing with multiple crises now and in the future, including the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and conflict. These insights have been broadly split into sub-sections for ease of reading, but they are interconnected and intertwined with one another. There are many terms used to describe the compound shocks that the world is currently facing, including multiple crises (World Bank, 2022a); cascading crises (Grynspan, 2022); overlapping crises (Donoghoe et al., 2022); intersecting disasters (Donoghoe et al., 2022); complex, interlinked crises (Brown, 2022);

compound issues (Martinez-Diaz & Sidner, 2021). This review does not distinguish between these or discuss the differing terminology.

Common themes emerging from the literature and lessons include:

- Resilience building matters, as does conflict sensitivity
- Combating inequality matters
- Social cohesion, trust and inclusion matters
- Community engagement matters
- Partnership and enabling greater collaboration matters
- Flexibility and adaptability matters
- A robust data infrastructure matters
- Preparation and preparedness matters
- Robust risk-informed decision-making under uncertainty matters

2. Facing multiple crises

More frequent, complex and destructive

Crises can come in many forms. There is growing evidence that the world is facing the prospect of more frequent, complex and destructive compound shocks. Martinez-Diaz and Sidner (2021) define compound shocks as being multiple disruptive events striking simultaneously or in rapid sequence, and can include events such as natural disasters, economic and financial crises, and pandemics. For example, Bangladesh, Fiji, Honduras, India, the Philippines, Mexico and Nicaragua all faced combinations of the Covid-19 pandemic, economic shocks associated with the pandemic and measures to contain it, and extreme weather events in 2020 (Martinez-Diaz & Sidner, 2021). The majority of the underlying and interconnected environmental, economic, social and relational challenges that exist in the globalised world pre-date Covid-19. But the difficulty of managing multiple crises is gaining further attention with the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, whose "creeping" character caused additional challenges that made its' management much harder to handle than those crises that are more sharply delineated in time (Boin et al., 2020, p. 198). This characteristic seems to be prevalent in many of the challenges facing the world – including climate change and fragility. Deep uncertainty is another defining characteristic of crisis (Rosenthal, Charles & t'Hart, 1989 cited in Boin, Lodge & Luesink, 2020, p. 191), but is often quickly reduced through established methods of information collection and analysis (i.e. "sense-making").

Furthermore, there is some argument that framing these layered, interconnected and complex challenges as "issues" or "crises" is problematic (Strand et al., 2022). Framing as an issue implies that the challenge can be addressed in a premeditated policy cycle and framing as a crisis implies something that requires extraordinary and emergency measures (Lakoff, 2017 cited in Strand et al., 2022). It is largely accepted that disasters are political events; "disaster risks are largely human-created and hence subject to the politics of prioritising (economic) interests over reducing them, foregrounding certain risks while ignoring others" (Hilhorst & Mena, 2021, p.S177). Securitisation of an emergency, such as in Covid-19, whilst arguably being a proper response, is often subject to politics, whereby crisis response measures also have secondary

political objectives, such as curbing civil society's space, tightening control etc. (Hilhorst & Mena, 2021, p. S177).

Previous risk and crisis management

The governance and management of global shocks and critical risks has long been recognised as being key to resilience of societies to disasters and has been on the international agenda long before Covid-19. For example, in 2014 the OECD High Level Risk Forum released the OECD Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Critical Risks to provide a strategic framework for benchmarking country progress in the area. The report, based on 34 country responses to an OECD survey, was the first evidence-based analysis of country implementation of the OECD Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Critical Risks. The report finds that progress remained uneven at the time. Specifically (OECD, 2018: 3):

- While countries generally have adopted national strategies, relatively few countries set priorities and allocate resources through a risk informed process and only few set performance targets.
- Two-thirds of countries have developed a horizon-scanning exercise, but only half possess the formal elements of a national risk assessment and use the results to inform emergency planning.
- Most countries deploy risk communication efforts and most have strategies to manage risk in some of the critical infrastructure sectors, but few map any interdependencies across sectors, and few provide incentives to small and medium-sized enterprises to encourage business continuity.
- Many countries have updated crisis management frameworks, but only half have the capacity to identify novel, unforeseen or complex crises. In countries with designated lead bodies for critical risks, in only half of those can the body report directly or through a minister to the head of government.
- Nearly all OECD countries use the results of risk assessment to inform the public about its exposure to natural hazards, but fewer do so about technological accidents. Examples of technological accidents include explosions, fires, chemical spills.

Intersections in vulnerability

It is important to consider the vulnerabilities that exacerbate the impacts of crises (Williams, 2020). Existing social inequities and power relations are a key framing in explaining vulnerability, which shapes people's ability to respond to external stresses (Mangubhai et al., 2021, p. 196). Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis have shown just how much inequality matters, and how it impacts every aspect of everyday life. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted inequalities and structural vulnerabilities across the world, often the result of long histories of marginalisation (Leach et al., 2021, p. 3). Minority ethnic communities, women, poorly paid and precarious employment, and the poorest were especially vulnerable to the impacts of Covid-19 (Mangubhai et al., 2021). This greater vulnerability relates to different poverty risks, for example, in the UK Black and minority ethnic people are 2.5 times more likely to be in poverty than their white counterparts (Edmiston, Begum & Kataria, 2022). The global pandemic has bought to light the effects of long-term and systemic marginalisation of groups in many different countries (Mangubhai et al., 2021, p. 202). Those that are most marginalised are likely to be most

vulnerable during disasters, but may not have a voice and can be missed during recovery efforts (Sovacool et al., 2018).

Those at the forefront of climate change are also those who were most adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (Singh, 2021). Any disaster will impact certain people and populations more severely and for longer periods of time than others. It is generally accepted that "people's level of vulnerability to disaster impacts is preconditioned by social inequalities" (Few et al., 2020, p. 12). Marginalised groups hence face disparate harm from compound crises (Hilhorst & Mena, 2021) – for example, the health and cascading secondary impacts of the pandemic disproportionately impacted internally displaced people, migrants, informal sector workers and women (Singh, 2021, p. 25). Paying attention to intersectionality fosters attention to differences in vulnerability, resilience, coping, and adaptation strategies and abilities in the context of simultaneous crises (such as climate change impacts and Covid-19). In particular, deep understanding of local dynamics and power structures is vital, as well as understanding the broader political economies and political ecologies of overlapping crises (Sultana, 2021).

Singh (2021, p. 4) outlines the importance of applying a systemic risk lens to help prevent the escalation and reduce the impact of future pandemics and crises – "governance structures, policies, plans, research, and actions need to be based on an evolving perception of risks and how to govern them that builds resilience into the interconnected systems." The report by Singh (2021) also suggests ways to reform and strengthen global governance, through: strengthening multilateralism (including improved cooperation among parties and across levels of government); creating and strengthening bilateral, regional and interregional partnerships; engaging all stakeholders; adopting a multisectoral, multidisciplinary approach; and prioritising a rights-based approach (Singh, 2021, p. 4).

Hilhorst and Mena (2021) in their paper explore what happened '*When Covid-19 meets conflict: politics of the pandemic response in fragile and conflict-affected states.*' Based on seven case studies of countries worldwide that experienced social conflict at the advent of the pandemic, covering the period from March–August 2020. Three countries were classified as low-intensity or post-conflict countries (the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti and Zimbabwe) with significant levels of state fragility, and the other four countries are characterised as having a strong or authoritarian state and social counter-movements (Brazil, Chile, India, and the Philippines). The paper highlights how disaster studies find that "disasters materialise through the interaction of a hazard, vulnerabilities, and responses" – hence responses to mitigate disaster "are often seen to lead to (new) disaster risk creation" (Hilhorst & Mena, 2021, p. S187). But "Whether a disaster will trigger or exacerbate conflict and vulnerabilities depends on pre-existing, country-specific conditions and how a government, and other actors, frame and respond to it" (Hilhorst & Mena, 2021, p. S188). The inadequate responses by these governments to the hazard of Covid-19 lead to disaster risk creation – as actions taken by governments to curb Covid-19 (such as lockdowns) were in contrast to the lack of responsibility to mitigate the ramifications of the crises and measures. In all instances, government responses were instrumentalised for political purposes not related to Covid-19, using Covid-19 measures to strengthen their control and agendas (Hilhorst & Mena, 2021, p. S177). For example, the suppression by the police and other units of social protest in Chile, Haiti, the Philippines, and Zimbabwe. Another example was the use of the lockdown and state of emergency to push through controversial and adverse measures, such as the passing of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 in the Philippines.

3. Emerging lessons from managing Covid-19 and beyond

Building resilience

Many parallels have been drawn between the response to Covid-19 and that needed to prevent the worst projections for climate change. This review found that many articles discuss the intersection of the pandemic and climate change (see Williams, 2020) but there is less focus on intersection with other crises (although being a rapid review this could also be reflective of the key words and search strategies used). In particular the concept of resilience has been discussed. Resilience is a loosely defined term, which means different things to different people, but largely relates to a community's ability to endure shocks and stresses (Williams, 2020). It also relates to addressing systemic vulnerabilities and injustices – many of which were brought to the fore during the pandemic. Resilience can also be related to strengthening social bonds and combating inequality. Leach et al. (2021, p. 1) drawing on over a decade of research on epidemics, highlight how Covid-19 demonstrates the uncertain future that the world faces, where "anticipation of and resilience to major shocks must become the core problematic of development studies and practice." A key lesson underscored in the literature is the need for urgent action but that strengthening of underlying systems takes a long-time (Williams, 2020). Communities and bottom-up approaches to resilience need long-term investment to be able to respond to crises. The following sub-sections all relate to building resilience but look at it from different angles.

Social protection tools

In a Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre working paper, Donoghoe et al. (2022) explore the use of novel social protection tools, programmes and systems in international responses to the pandemic alongside concurrent climate-related disasters. The paper draws on two "mini" in-depth case studies from the Philippines and India to explore the question of social protection responses to intersecting disasters and Covid-19. It finds that the social protection measures implemented in India and the Philippines to respond to Covid-19 could be extended or adapted to provide the foundation for comprehensive social protection frameworks to manage future compounding risks. Both India and the Philippines made important changes to eligibility criteria in their social protection systems, invested in new distribution or identification systems, or adapted current programmes to be more flexible (Donoghoe et al., 2022, p. 28).

Some key learnings and insights include:

- *The pandemic revealed inadequacies in the dominant single-hazard disaster management approaches, which is also applied in shock-responsive social protection.* Social Protection and other disaster response systems needed to manage impacts unfolding on different timescales and with different magnitudes, especially where Covid-19 intersected with disaster events such as floods and cyclones. In these cases, a single, uniform response was likely to be inadequate, overproviding for some while underproviding for others (Donoghoe et al., 2022, p. 32).

- *The pre-existence of social protection systems had a strong relationship to the speed of programme expansion.* The experience of Covid-19 in 2020 shows the importance of social protection systems that are in place and institutionalised before shocks materialise – including solid information systems and digitalisation – which allowed for coherent, joined-up approaches to be quickly mobilised (Donoghoe et al., 2022, p. 32).

- *Despite the speed with which social protection responses were generally adopted and implemented, there was a widespread inability to meet coverage and demand, especially when providing for informal sector workers and vulnerable groups and considering technical/logistical limitations.* Furthermore, achieving transformation and lasting reductions in vulnerability were difficult, due to the preference for short-term and one-off, rather than long-lasting, permanent assistance schemes (Donoghoe et al., 2022, p. 3).

- *The importance of having systems that can target flexibly those working in informal sectors and cope with unexpected changes. However, methods of identification using pre-existing registers are likely to lead to some level of exclusion errors, resulting in lower rates of meaningful coverage.* The challenges in meeting the needs of rapidly increasing numbers of vulnerable people across different groups (such as middle-income households during the pandemic) have important implications for the increasingly important role of social protection in responding to intersecting shocks (Donoghoe et al., 2022, p. 32). Investments in new programmes in India and the Philippines targeted at migrant and informal workers, who are typically harder to target, are meaningful improvements. Although India had difficulty meeting the needs of all its informal workers, in part due to the comparatively large size of the sector in the country (Donoghoe et al., 2022, pp. 28-29).

- *Future systems need to have the flexibility to respond to different types of disasters, with each governance level (local, state, national) adequately equipped to manage and reduce the impacts.* Coordinated efforts across sectors within governments were important in ensuring successes in response, and the financing of compounding disasters will require even more coordinated approaches (Donoghoe et al., 2022, pp. 32-33).

Donoghoe et al. (2022, p. 4) point to the increasingly important role of social protection in response to intersecting shocks, but find that overall there is "limited attention paid to the impacts and management of intersecting disasters – from both the disaster response and [social protection] sectors." And questions remain around the effectiveness of different policy approaches, particularly regarding coverage, inclusivity and flexibility, and around how best to integrate responses across agencies and institutions, including logistically, organisationally and financially (Donoghoe et al., 2022, p. 35).

Fragility, vulnerability and conflict sensitivity

Fragility, according to the OECD (2022) "is the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacities of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks." Fragility is multidimensional (such as economic, environmental, political, societal dimensions etc.), complex and diverse, with different drivers and consequences across contexts. Furthermore, fragility is not confined to "fragile contexts", it is global, dynamic and in all types of systems – as exposed by Covid-19 (Nwajiaku-Dahou, El Taraboulsi-McCarthy & Rocha Menocal, 2020; Leach et al., 2021). New challenges and crises (and responses to these) will interact with existing inequalities and grievances, and gaps in institutional capacity and potentially exacerbate existing risks of conflict, especially in fragile, conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts (Bousquet & Fernandez-Taranco, 2020). Hence, country-level response efforts to crises need to be conflict sensitive and tailored to the individual context, with a clear understanding of the root causes of conflict and fragility and sources of resilience in each situation and those most marginalised and vulnerable (Bousquet & Fernandez-Taranco, 2020; OECD, 2022). These responses also need to address the multidimensionality of fragility to better understand the

dynamic interplay of systems, cultures, risks and coping capacities in fragile contexts; this also relates to having robust data and analysis infrastructure (OECD, 2022). Khan Mohmand (2020, p. 3) also suggests a 'political economy of fragility' lens is particularly important in understanding the particular and complex nature of fragility in designing and planning differentiated interventions. Specifically, such an approach helps focus attention on the formation and incentives of actors and institutions within such contexts, allows an understanding how political settlements have occurred, and explains why some groups may trust the state and policy interventions less than other groups within the same contexts (Khan Mohmand, 2020, p. 3).

Few et al. (2020) in a British Academy paper highlight key insights from research on other crisis situations to inform recovery from the impacts of Covid-19 and the management of responses to future crises. They highlight a number of inter-related lessons, including:

- *Vulnerability is not static during the progression of long-duration or slow-onset hazards* – everything is in flux (people's losses and needs, their knowledge, attitudes and practices and the hazard threat), vulnerability may shift and this may increase "risky" behaviour (Few et al., 2020, p. 4).

- *Crisis response tends to be immediate and short-term and does not encompass long-term recovery planning* – governments tend to think of hazards as singular events with clear start and end dates; a forward-thinking approach to dealing with multiple and unfolding drivers and effects of crises is needed (Few et al., 2020, p. 5). Leach et al. (2021, pp. 2-3) highlight how lessons have frequently been drawn in the past for how to improve preparedness and response to different crises, yet these have rarely been applied, and there is often a narrow, technocratic response, addressing problems as if they were one-off disasters (Leach et al., 20221, pp. 2-3)

- *Expect a socially uneven process and work to reduce inequities in people's trajectories of recovery* – not everyone recovers in the same way; and some may become more marginalised through the recovery process (Few et al., 2020, p. 6).

- *Recognise that recovery agendas and actions are shaped by power and politics which can lead to poorly designed and incorrectly targeted interventions* – typically excluded or marginalised voices often find it harder to make their vision of recovery matter (Few et al., 2020, p. 8).

- *Work on recovery does not have to be solely reactive* – capacities to recover can be strengthened before, as well as during and after disasters (i.e. building resilience) (Few et al., 2020, p. 10).

- *Recognising and supporting grassroots recovery capacities* – communities hold important knowledge and capacities that need to be recognised in order to achieve long term resilience and recovery from any form of crisis; agency at grassroots level needs to be encouraged in anticipation of future crises (Few et al., 2020, p. 11).

Governance for resilience

In a Carnegie Endowment working paper, Brown (2022) discusses how states can prepare for the next crises with a focus on governance for resilience. Surveying the evidence, Brown reviews

the governance-related characteristics and capabilities that affect a country's resilience[1]. An overarching insight is that governance for resilience is complex and often multidirectional – the embrace of resilience should not be unalloyed and policymakers "must find a way to balance the need for inclusive resilience with the imperative for meaningful reform" (Brown, 2022, p. 14). Brown (2022, p. 2) highlights three governance "super-factors" that they see as being "powerful in enabling a country to augment its resilience through multiple pathways" (other governance-related factors are also discussed but have less clear-cut effects on resilience and are more nuanced). The three super-factors are:

- *High levels of societal trust:* "A high level of societal trust in government greatly assists a state's potential for adaptability and resilience…While both trust among citizens and citizens' trust in their government are important, trustworthy governments are especially consequential because they can influence two types of interpersonal trust: communal trust and generalized trust…The more trustworthy a government, the more likely its citizens will agree to the necessary, though often painful, adjustments that are needed to weather shocks" (Brown, 2022, pp. 9-10). This dynamic was evident during citizen's compliance with Covid-19 restrictions in different countries and the 2014–2015 Ebola outbreak in Liberia. Hilhorst and Mena (2021) highlight how pre-existing high levels of mistrust in authorities in many of their conflict-Covid-19 case study countries (such as Chile, the DRC, Haiti, and Zimbabwe) meant that top-down responses were met with suspicion and resulted in a lack of legitimacy for the government's actions. The pandemic revealed trust deficits between states and citizens in many countries, such as China, Pakistan, Brazil, the US and Tanzania, at times testing already fragile relationships (Khan Mohmand, 2020). Low or a lack of institutional trust also has implications for the adoption of interventions and recovery programmes after a crisis (Khan Mohmand, 2020, p. 6). State-citizen alliances are really important in times of crisis, and beyond, and trust is a key part of this (Leach et al., 2021, p. 9).

- *Low corruption levels:* "Controlling corruption is a key precondition for building resilience. In order to respond to exogenous shocks, states need to be both willing and able to take action—yet corruption often erodes both the government's will to act, through perverting incentives, and its ability to act, through draining resources and hollowing out the state" (Brown, 2022, p. 10). This dynamic is exacerbated during episodes of crisis, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic and during natural disasters. Corruption can also impede the very projects states undertake in order to increase resilience. Corruption can also erode public trust in governments (see point above).

- *High-quality political leadership:* Underlying each of the above factors is the reality that "the choices and quality of political leadership are of paramount importance in determining a country's level of resilience. Leaders [at multiple levels of government] make consequential decisions that affect, in some way, almost all [other] governance characteristics…By influencing the tone and norms of politics, senior officials also have an outsized influence on whether or not a period of crisis will bring unity or fragmentation.

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[1] Brown defines resilience at the national level as being understood as "a country's capacity to respond to, adapt to, and grow from stresses and shocks. Resilience focuses on bolstering the overall performance of a system in the face of unpredictable and often interconnected hazards, making it different from risk management, which relates to specific hazards. A country's resilience depends on the internal characteristics that allow for states and their institutions to navigate a variety of disruptions" (Brown, 2022, p. 2).

…Individual leaders often also determine their country's ability to harness international partnerships that often aid in building resilience" (Brown, 2022, p. 11).

Governance for resilience links to a recent shift towards an emerging "fragility-to-resilience" paradigm in the development community, with the development of new fragility and resilient assessment tools, frameworks and financing instruments that can be applied to resilient state-building (Papoulidis, 2022). This is moving attention away from only needs in fragile contexts, towards complex risks and coping capacities. The concept of taking a long-term "fragility-to-resilience" approach to deal with compounding crises is taking hold, contrasting with aid delivered through siloed and short-term projects that focus on a single or narrow set of immediate issues (Devex Partnerships, 2022).

Social cohesion, inclusion and community engagement

During a disaster, inequities in society are revealed and exacerbated (Jewett et al., 2021). Previous research has demonstrated that natural disasters may be "worsened by human factors such as mismanagement, underdevelopment, profiteering, neoliberal capitalism, and crisis politics" (Sovacool et al., 2018: 243). This means countries need to address ethical and social justice considerations and the politics of recovery efforts by putting vulnerable and marginalised groups front and centre in the aftermath of pandemics and natural disasters. Furthermore, social cohesion and inclusiveness is core to addressing fragility across the world.

Social cohesion and social capital

Social cohesion is an important component of the pre-disaster, acute, post-disaster, and recovery phases, in particular it is a primary resource for communities to draw upon during a crisis (Jewett et al., 2021, p. 330). Jewett et al. (2021) undertook a rapid scoping review of evidence for social cohesion and community resilience during a disaster, highlighting findings for Covid-19 to inform the *United Nations Research Roadmap for COVID-19 Recovery (*November 2020). Jewett et al. (2021, p. 325) define social cohesion as "the degree of social connectedness and solidarity between different community groups within a society, as well as the level of trust and connectedness between individuals and across community groups." It exists and can interact at multiple levels – from household through to international relations. "Covid-19 has tested the strength of social cohesion and community resilience across geographic levels (household, community, local, regional, and national)" (Jewett et al., 2021, p. 326).

The importance of social cohesion is largely driven by the core role that social capital plays in building resilience to conflict and disaster (Jewett et al., 2021, p. 330) – social capital is defined as "features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1993 cited in Jewett et al., 2021, p. 326), and is an important consideration for long-lasting disaster recovery. Social capital can be split into three mutually-reinforcing functions of "bonding" within communities, "bridging" across communities, and "linking" between communities and formal institutions (Jewett et al., 2021, p. 326).

Jewett et al.'s review highlights a number of common factors that promote social cohesion in disaster recovery: "(a) government interventions (financial stimulus, social protections, etc), (b) government protocols for communicating with the public and stakeholder engagement, (c) community-led and localized recovery efforts, and (d) community-building events and opportunities" (Jewett et al., 2021, p. 331). Common factors that impede social cohesion during disaster recovery include: "(a) armed conflict, (b) government centralization of power, (c) overuse

of police, (d) inequitable and unevenly distributed resources, (e) narrowly defined recovery programs at the national level, and (f) lack of stakeholder engagement across levels of government" (Jewett et al., 2021, p. 331). To strengthen and leverage social cohesion and community resilience during a crisis, there is a need for investment in these resources beforehand during prosperous times. The paper concludes that "Any interventions that seek to intervene in social cohesion and community resilience must do so with an equity lens that brings together all parties involved" (Jewett et al., 2021, p. 333).

Local action and community engagement

As discussed in a previous Covid Collective helpdesk (Price, 2022), local and community-based responses to the Covid-19 pandemic often mirrored or built on past responses to crises and climate impacts, and these will likely be important to withstanding future threats. A key aspect of the definition of resilience for many is social cohesion and inclusion. Some research has found that connecting local government to grassroots efforts can build resilience (Williams, 2020). Hilhorst and Mena (2021) found that in many of their country case studies people had to rely on their own coping mechanisms and bottom-up community initiatives to deal with the Covid-19 crisis. Interestingly, the paper finds that "the mobilisation of social protest that had been taking place before the outbreak transformed into community assistance to respond to the pandemic" (Hilhorst & Mena, 2021, p. S186).

A report from the British Academy (2021) on addressing the long-term societal impacts of Covid-19, draws on an evidence review, to highlight seven strategic goals for policymakers to pursue in order to shape the following "Covid decade" and future challenges. It recommends both strengthening community-led social infrastructure and promoting a shared social purpose to prepare for crises. Community-led social infrastructure has been an essential but precarious lifeline in the crisis, and its importance will only grow as society faces multiple crises. These communities are also important in establishing and rebuilding trust and cohesion after the crises (British Academy, 2021, p. 34). The pandemic brought out some of the best features of a compassionate, cooperative and innovative society, driven by the shared purpose of responding to the crisis, with different actors working together towards a common goal because of a shared sense of urgency and necessity (British Academy, 2021, p. 37). There is hence a need to strengthen and expand community-led social infrastructure that underpins the vital services and support structures needed to enhance local resilience, particularly in the most deprived areas. For example, schools, universities, places of worship, libraries and sports clubs (British Academy, 2021, p. 34).

Also reflecting the role of local efforts is a report by the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), which presents the results of a 2020 survey and literature review, including lessons learned on how stakeholders around the world have leveraged existing disaster risk reduction programmes to better prevent, prepare, respond to and recover from Covid-19 and future challenges (UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, 2021). A key insight is the swift adaptation of many civil society organisations and grassroots level organisations during the pandemic, leveraging existing local disaster risk reduction networks and programmes. Key components of success were local presence and partnerships, leveraging local knowledge for the creation of solutions, inclusion and meaningful community participation, and existing networks of trusted relationships with vulnerable groups (UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, 2021, p. 6).

Systems approach

Another insight from the UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism survey and report is that systemic risk requires systemic solutions. Many of the recommendations from the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism survey respondents converged on the need for systems approaches to build resilience in organisations and communities to systemic risks. The report explains that "A systems approach for disaster risk reduction would necessarily begin with a focus on all facets of risk reduction, including preventing hazards, reducing exposure and vulnerability and building adaptive capacity" (UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, 2021, p. 8). The report argues that national Governments and the United Nations (UN) system should lead the way in pandemic and multi-hazard prevention and preparedness (UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, 2021, p. 8).

Reflecting on the lessons from the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism survey and literature review, the report concludes by highlighting a number of key features that future and existing disaster risk reduction programmes need to address in order for societies to thrive in the midst of an intensifying and multi-hazard global risk landscape. These include agility and adaptability, flexible support to local actors, the ability to leverage trusted partnerships and networks, collaboration with stakeholders and through meaningful engagement of community groups, giving power to local actors, coherence across sectors and levels of governance (UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, 2021, pp. 52-53).

Dealing with uncertainty and risk

Das et al. (2021, p. 1) draw lessons from the global Covid-19 response, focusing on two root causes behind what they call "the deficiencies in this response": (i) challenges in collaboration and coordination between multiple actors and (ii) weaknesses in existing data infrastructure. They highlight how the pandemic forced governments to "contend with how to act when there is an absence of evidence" (Das et al., 2021, p. 1). They argue that to effectively respond to the medium- and long-term impacts of Covid and future crises, policy processes need to adopt an active learning mindset, enable greater collaboration, and set up a robust data infrastructure.

- *Adopting an active learning mindset:* In an uncertain world, a crisis response that works must be not only clear and decisive and based on data, but also flexible and modular to incorporate rapid learning and new knowledge. Governments and policymakers must also recognise that we are in a learning environment marked by experimentation, that there are well-developed machinery for how to make decisions amid uncertainty, and that a broad, diverse expertise is needed. In other words, learn as you act and act to learn (Das et al., 2021, p. 6). Das et al.'s (2021, p. 7) experience has been that "an Active Learning mindset can help coordination and collaboration between disciplines, because it allows an admission of what we do not know and what we (jointly) hope to be able to learn." This mindset can also enable rapid action in a crisis despite substantial uncertainty, whilst ensuring that the policy response is refined and improved over time (Das et al., 2021, p. 7).

- *Improving coordination and building state capacity for crisis response:* "Building an institutional environment that is responsive, has the capacity to deliver, and that values data and knowledge has benefits beyond the current pandemic and can potentially change the trajectory of state capacity in many parts of the world" (Das et al., 2021, p. 7). Governments need to create new structures in the face of crises – these can be

introduced mid-stream, created on the basis of new knowledge. For example, Liberia and Sierra Leone were able to create fast, flat, and flexible structures to successfully deal with the Ebola epidemic. To create a learning state that can coordinate between the relevant actors in a time of crises it is important to prepare flexible plans and templates and to introduce organisational structures based on current knowledge for managing potential crises. It is also critical to create central structures that can coordinate across agencies, empower decentralised actors and leadership, enable local innovation, and disseminate active learning through experimentation. Such an institutional environment also values error correction mechanisms and real-time learning (Das et al., 2021, p. 7).

- *Preparing data infrastructure for crisis response:* Crises require immediate action, and delays can be very costly, hence, they need to be proactively prepared for. Building information/data systems and protocols to support effective and rapid decision-making before a crisis is critical. In particular, digitising census data is key and can yield large benefits for service delivery. This data infrastructure can leverage existing data sources. "In times of crisis, these systems can simply be switched on and immediately leveraged to design a data-driven policy response to target those affected, to forecast needs, and to evaluate the impact of policy measures" (Das et al., 2021, p. 8).

This need for a robust global infrastructure that can deal with uncertainty is echoed by others. Leach et al. (2021, p. 2) argue that complex crises (such as the Covid-19 pandemic) require analysis that "addresses both structural political-economic conditions alongside far less ordered, 'unruly' processes reflecting complexity, uncertainty, contingency and context-specificity." Taylor et al. (2022, p. 1) argue that the existing global health research infrastructure is "afflicted by weak institutional mechanisms and perpetuation of evidence hierarchies and silos and excludes and devalues different knowledges and lived experience." They provide recommendations for action by G7 members including around a revitalised, or new, global health research and learning infrastructure that incorporates knowledge and evidence systems that accept and engage with uncertainty, and that feeds into reinvigorated multilateral coordination mechanisms. Including investment in digital technologies and systems for monitoring, early warning, and crisis preparedness, underpinned by open data (Taylor et al., 2022, p. 1).

Some of the strategic goals proposed by the British Academy (2021) report on addressing the long-term societal impacts of Covid-19 and future challenges, link to the above recommendations from Das et al. (2021). Including:

- *Build multi-level governance:* To improve responsiveness and resilience to future crises there is a need to build multi-level governance structures based on empowering participation, engagement and cooperation to strengthen the capacity to identify and respond to local needs. Multi-level governance must work vertically and laterally, so both scale and place are essential dimensions (British Academy, 2021, p. 20).

- *Improve knowledge, data and information linkage, sharing and communication*: This will enable all decision-makers to work from a shared understanding of the facts, so as to be better prepared for future crises. In particular, communication should be made a two-way process, informing while also engaging people and organisations to participate by feeding back information, with greater transparency of sources to improve trust. Communication needs to reflect and learn from people's lived experience (British Academy, 2021, p. 7).

Diwakar and Shepherd (2022) in response to the World Bank's recent course correction reports (World Bank, 2022a,b – see multilateral response section) argue that the World Bank's fiscal recovery-focused blueprint is only part of the solution and that the scale of the current layered crises needs a more ambitious transformative pathway to zero poverty. This calls for centring 'social justice, peace and the planet' and a focus on recovery, despite the layered crises. Responding to crises trajectories is essential and risk management strategies need to consider the layering of crises. They suggest that Covid-19 should have been treated "as a rapid-onset disaster with slow-onset stressors that continue to prolong its impacts today", especially on poverty (Diwakar & Shepherd, 2022). Furthermore, underlying vulnerabilities of people and communities can amplify crises. Hence, a challenge in crises is to sustain the additional commitments of expenditure needed in other key areas (such as health, education, social protection, agriculture, economic development including in the informal economy) to support people's agency and also address sources of vulnerability. Diwakar and Shepherd (2022) conclude that "Real transformation towards poverty eradication in contexts of complex crises starts from a premise of sustained risk-informed, people-centred change that asks vulnerable groups about their changing needs amidst crises and responds in real-time through adaptive and participatory decision-making."

Multilateral response

World Bank learnings

The World Bank has released a number of reports in recent months drawing on learnings from the Covid-19 pandemic but also beyond this to previous crisis. The World Bank's latest *Poverty and Shared Prosperity* report (2022b) highlights three lessons learned from the pandemic that it believes remain valid for future crises. Although the report acknowledges that "(1) in the medium term, fiscal policy cannot play the same protective role in countries with higher costs of borrowing and weaker delivery systems; and (2) it is crucial to supplement actions to strengthen the ability to respond to crises with other means of supporting poor households to cope with shocks" (World Bank, 2022b, p. 216). The three key lessons are (World Bank, 2022b, p. 117):

- *The importance of a country's ability to borrow to finance a fiscal response;*
- *The challenges of reaching households and protecting jobs in informal economies;*
- *The need for delivery systems that can identify vulnerable people (not just the chronically poor) and provide support quickly.*

The report highlights that these lessons should be heeded in the current food and energy price crisis, as governments appear to be turning towards inefficient subsidies rather than well-targeted support to manage the crisis. The report recommends "Addressing debt, preparing contingent financing, and developing delivery systems to deliver in a crisis" as being key to increasing the protective power of fiscal policy in future crises (World Bank, 202b, p. 142). Drawing on these lessons learned from the global pandemic, the report highlights three priority areas that need action to realise the potential of fiscal measures in the coming years (World Bank, 2022b, p. xiv, xxii):

- *Reorient spending away from subsidies toward support targeted to poor and vulnerable groups* – choose targeted cash transfers instead of broad subsidies and avoid overly rapid withdrawal of income support.

- *Prioritise public spending that supports long-run development (even in crisis times).* Covid-19 has underlined how progress achieved over decades can vanish suddenly. High-return investments in education, research and development, and infrastructure projects and preparation should be made now.

- *When needed, mobilise tax revenues without hurting the poor.* This can be done by introducing property taxes, broadening the base of personal and corporate income taxes, and reducing regressive tax exemptions.

Additional lessons drawn from past crises include (World Bank Group Development Committee, 2021, pp. 5-6):

- *Strong and well-coordinated public institutions and robust digital infrastructure play significant roles in prevention, preparedness, and response.* Countries with better governance, stronger and well-coordinated institutions—backed by sufficient fiscal space—are less likely to be pushed into crisis by a shock and are better able to muster the multi-sectoral responses needed to mitigate damage. Digital development is critical in delivering better services, enabling access to finance, and facilitating improved interactions between citizens and institutions.

- *Global and regional policy coordination is critical in helping countries deal with crises.* During crises, there is an acute need to mobilise resources tailored to the specific needs of the affected countries, and bring together global, regional and local expertise, and effectively collaborate among different actors (including the public sector, the private sector, different levels of government, civil society etc.). Effective coordination is only possible if productive partnerships among international institutions have been built before the crisis.

The World Bank has recently set out its operational response to the crises affecting developing countries in its Global Crises Response Framework Paper 2022 (World Bank, 2022a), which rests on four interconnected pillars combining support to crisis response and long-term development. The framework builds on the Pillars from the World Bank's Covid-19 crisis response, and incorporates lessons learned from responding to the pandemic as well as to past food crises. Some of the previous lessons learned include (World Bank, 2022a, pp. 13-14):

- *Institutional strengthening is a necessary foundation for bolstering crisis preparedness and resilience.* Strengthening national systems and institutions to respond to crises is essential, as highlighted by the critical role of public section institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic (in data collection, coordination, defining appropriate crisis response etc.).

- *Digital solutions, incorporating appropriate data protections, serve as a key tool.* High-quality disaggregated data is paramount to understand the situations of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, thus supporting inclusive development

- *Covid-19 crisis response in fragile and conflict-affected situations underscores the need for adaptive support.*

- *Support to the private sector is key to recovery.* The importance of developing and providing agile solutions with short- to long-term support during crises is key to minimising the economic impact within economies and sustaining private sector activity and job opportunities.

- *Coordinated institutional approaches are especially valuable in dealing with sudden-onset components of global food price crises.* They enhance speed, cross-country

consistency, coordination of inter-departmental efforts, collaboration, and foster additionality in resource mobilisation (World Bank, 2022a, p. 43).

Future role of multilateral institutions and architecture

The World Bank learnings highlighted above largely reflect macroeconomic fiscal support and structural issues – but also echo some of the learnings raised in previous sections. There is much discussion around the inadequacy of the current structures of multilateral development banks' (and the multilateral system generally) – designed at the end of the Second World War to focus on rebuilding peacetime economies – to mobilise and deliver the huge amounts of additional money that is needed to tackle the current overlapping crises (Lawder & Shalal, 2022). The challenge facing the international financing architecture is that it was built primarily to protect the global economy from crises at the individual country level, and not for cascading crises affecting multiple countries at once (Grynspan, 2022). Hence, multilateral institutions have not been built for "multiplexity," where global power is more diffuse and international order is not exclusively defined by Western liberalism (Gulrajani, 2022). In the recent IMF and World Bank annual meetings, the World Bank leadership was asked to deliver a roadmap for revamping the bank's institutional and operational framework by the end of the year (Lawder & Shalal, 2022). Although many have had a crisis of confidence in the effectiveness of multilateralism and multilateral development banks, others see them as being key to dealing with overlapping crises and shared global challenges. Ahmed and Lee (2022) argue that the world already has a multilateral system that with the right reforms and the right financial capacity, has the potential scale, reach, knowledge, and tools to play a much bigger role in confronting these challenges. Gulrajani (2022) also advocates for global cooperation and multilateralism to deal with interlocking crises, but argues the need to find concrete reform proposals that are tailored to geopolitical realities and consider the requirements of real-world implementation, in order to fashion a fit-for-purpose multilateral system.

In response to the World Bank's recent course correction reports (World Bank, 2022a,b) some commentaries argue that we need to move away from a sole focus on macroeconomic fiscal support and recovery (Diwakar & Shepherd, 2022). Others argue the need for a rethink of development and the international architecture, with Covid-19 exposing the fragility of the current globalised capitalist economy and acting as a reminder that the world faces an uncertain future (Leach et al., 2021, p. 7). Leach et al. (2021, p. 7) argue that approaches "focused on fixing existing structures through standardised investments to boost economic growth miss opportunities for a deeper rethinking of economic systems for a post-pandemic transformation." Their analysis of over a decade of research on epidemics and Covid-19 reveals the need for development approaches that can anticipate and respond to future, uncertain shocks. Their lessons centre on "the need to embrace fundamental, transformative change, to navigate uncertainty and prepare for turbulence as a central requirement of development" globally (Leach et al., 2021, p. 9). They highlight how the assumptions of conventional modalities of development (such as the World Bank and IMF) that emphasise "a control-oriented approach, premised on modernist vision of prediction and planning" have been challenged by the complex and unruly effects of the pandemic (Leach et al., 2021, p. 9).

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