ENSURING AN INCLUSIVE AND RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY: A SERIES

How can we ensure we build back better in the wake of the pandemic?

The 2023 UN SDG Summit underscored a sobering truth: we confront multiple crises stemming from the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and concurrent global challenges.

We must continue to hold governments, donors and other powerful actors accountable for Covid policies that led to further disruptions in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
WORLD IN LOCKDOWN, DEVELOPMENT ON HOLD

In 2021, CPDE reported on the Covid-19 response across 33 countries, compiling evidence from its civil society organisation members.

Through the lens of Effective Development Cooperation (EDC), the report found that governments were not only ineffective in their response but in many cases implemented measures that reduced civic spaces and neglected human rights.

The 2021 report offered recommendations for governments and donors, emphasising leaving no one behind, a human rights-based approach, and EDC principles. We now assess their implementation and post-Covid recovery trends.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

Align ODA with domestic development priorities and eliminate conditionalities

ASSESSMENT

In 2021 the IMF reinstated austerity measures on low-income countries. 13 of the 15 IMF loan programs negotiated in the second year of the pandemic require austerity measures like taxes on food or spending cuts that could put vital public services at risk.

Nine (9) countries including Cameroon, Senegal and Suriname must introduce or increase value-added taxes (VAT), applied to essentials like food and clothing, disproportionately affecting the poor. Kenya’s $2.3 bn loan program includes a three-year public sector pay freeze and higher taxes on cooking gas and food. (Oxfam, 2022).
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

Extending grants instead of loans as COVID-19 support to developing countries

ASSESSMENT

While IFIs and MDBs provided emergency relief to developing countries, multilateral support came mostly in the forms of loans. The World Bank’s COVID-19 recovery package amounted to $93 billion, with only 14% as grants ($13.2 bn). Most LDCs are either already in or near debt distress; saddling them with more would only hinder national development priorities such as strengthening global health systems. In the Asia-Pacific for instance, debt relief and grants accounted for less than 4% of total support.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

Creating mechanisms and democratic processes for meaningful participation of various stakeholders

ASSESSMENT

In 2021 and 2022, the Global Partnership provided technical support for country-led, multi-stakeholder Action Dialogues in 17 countries (in LAC, MENA, Sub-saharan Africa, and SE Asia).

CPDE’s Voluntary National Reviews study shows that while engagement mechanisms for civil society organisations (CSOs) have become more institutionalised, many have inadequate structures and conditions for their genuine participation. Only half of CSO respondents indicated that they were included in their country’s VNR consultation process.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

Ensuring an Enabling Environment for CSOs to operate as development partners in their own right

ASSESSMENT

VDem reports that 'global democracy in 2022 matches 1986 levels,' and International IDEA reports 'half of world democracies are in retreat.' Currently, 68% of the world’s population live in autocracies, up from 48% in 2010.

Restrictive Covid-19 measures were weaponised by leaders aiming to erode freedom of expression association and peaceful assembly. In Cambodia the govt used the COVID-19 law to stifle protests, detain and criminalise union leaders from NagaWorld, a casino worker union, in 2022.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

Regularly sharing and publishing relevant, timely, and accurate information that will help CSOs and the public

ASSESSMENT

Transparency and accountability deteriorated when governments scrambled to secure supplies during the pandemic.

Civil society stepped up, playing a key role in increasing transparency, demanding public accountability, monitoring budget execution, advocating for fair fiscal responses and public services and raising public awareness of corruption. Examples include citizens’ budget trackers and real-time audits supported by civil society.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

Create a unified platform for citizen access

A 2022 UN DESA survey found that 90% of Member States created dedicated pandemic portals or integrated pandemic-related matters into national portals. In LAC, CEPAL noted limited government efforts for online consultations and e-participation.

Covid-19 laid bare the profound extent of the digital divide. The surge in online services throughout the pandemic disregarded the 2.9 billion people globally who lack internet access. This disparity was especially pronounced among vulnerable communities and rural dwellers.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

CSOs urge governments to focus on results to guide decision-making, monitoring and evaluation.

ASSESSMENT

In 2021, the Covid Hygiene Hub surveyed 65 developing countries highlighting challenges in assessing COVID-19 response effectiveness. They sought additional qualitative indicators to understand the 'why' and 'how' of program impact.

An Oxford study of 106 countries reveals disparities in budgeting, monitoring, and health service delivery, with some excelling (e.g. Pakistan, Micronesia). Many lack a systematic approach to planning and subnational capacity. From Dec 2021-May 2023, only 5 of 192 WHO member countries adopted the Universal Health & Preparedness Review for COVID, a voluntary evaluation tool.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

Include the needs of marginalised sectors in the pandemic response

ASSESSMENT

The Covid crisis worsened inequalities in the labour market and health care, disproportionally affecting disadvantaged groups such as youth and Indigenous peoples (OECD, 2022).

A 15-country study found less visible populations were neglected in policy responses. In Thailand, India, Mexico, and the UK, the vital role of civil society came to light in addressing intricate vulnerabilities of at-risk groups when governments and health systems failed to provide equitable support and protection.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

Adopt a human rights-based approach

Health care inequality remains a crucial human rights issue, exacerbated by Covid-19. In Aug 2023, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) urged global North states, in particular Germany, Switzerland, the UK, and the US to forgo intellectual property rights on pandemic protections like vaccines, treatments, or healthcare technologies to fully respect human rights.

About 32% of the global population received at least one vaccine booster. However, in developing countries such as Gabon, Papua New Guinea, Burundi and Madagascar, it is less than 1%.
The pandemic exacerbated gender inequalities, with 940 million women aged 15 and up experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity in 2021, compared to 813 million men in the same age group. This gap, primarily due to increases in Asia and LAC, grew from 1.7% in 2019 to 4.3% in 2021.

In a 2021 report, UN Women found that women were significantly less likely to report receiving pandemic-related cash relief from governments (10% of women vs 16% of men). Single women living with children were especially left behind, being less than half as likely as single men living with children to receive cash relief (12% of W versus 25% of M).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT COVID RECOVERY

Promote gender equality, particularly in terms of access to public services

FEMINIST APPROACH

ASSESSMENT
THE LONG ROAD TOWARDS RECOVERY

The call to improve today’s outdated, dysfunctional, and unjust international financial architecture resounded at the 2023 SDG Summit, with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recognising this as “a game-changer in accelerating SDG progress”.

Civil society played a vital role in strengthening civic engagement, promoting human rights, and delivering social services during the pandemic. It is thus essential that States commit to EDC principles to ensure a democratic, equitable recovery that leaves no one behind.

Visit csopartnership.org to learn more about CPDE’s work in advancing development effectiveness principles.