Over 400 civil society groups from across the world unite to demand world leaders act together to fight COVID-19 and deliver a plan to build back better

In response to the global crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, community volunteers, local civil society groups, and major non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have joined forces to [demand a 12-point plan from world leaders](https://www.gcaptor.org/12-point-plan).

Ahead of the World Health Assembly and as governments consider key steps towards recovery, the group is calling for a joined up plan to fight the crisis and build a just recovery that tackles the interlinked challenges of providing universal healthcare, reducing inequalities and guaranteeing human rights; alongside the critical need to re-think our economies in response to the parallel crises of climate change and biodiversity.

An unprecedented coalition of over 400 organisations working on human rights and sustainable development in every continent have come together including Action for Sustainable Development, CIVICUS, Femnet, Forus, GCAP, Global Citizen, HelpAge International, Oxfam, Restless Development, Save The Children, Women Deliver and many more regional networks, voluntary groups and local activists.

It comes as the impact of the crisis on the poorest and most vulnerable groups is becoming increasingly evident. Recent analysis shows that the COVID-19 crisis risks pushing half a billion people into poverty. The UN has estimated that the pandemic could almost double the number of people suffering acute hunger, pushing it to more than a quarter of a billion by the end of 2020 and there are predictions of very high numbers of more cases of domestic violence around the world this year as a result of pandemic restrictions.

The statement comes ahead of a joint ‘Day of Solidarity’ to highlight community action around the world on Friday, 22 May 2020.

In a joint statement, the groups have said: “We are strongly committed to ensuring that civil society organisations and volunteers play a critical role in supporting community action and ensuring that those who are most often marginalised are not left behind through this challenging time... but we expect world leaders to ensure key measures are addressed to build a fairer future.”

Rebecca Malby, GCAP Global Co-Chair:

“Now is the best time to come together to change the system that created these multiple crises. Only with the people can governments achieve the change we need.”

Riccardo Moro, GCAP Global Co-Chair:

“This global pandemic shows how connected we are, but at the same time how weak we are in responding together. Competition among nations and irresponsible delegitimization of multilateral institutions, combined with neoliberal policies that have..."
systematically shrunk resources and public roles, have harmed our capacity to respond
to this crisis. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, the most vulnerable are paying the highest
price and inequalities, already unacceptable, are increasing. We need strong political
initiatives to provide health care and social protection for all. We need robust policies to
support a fair recovery in the framework of climate justice, focusing on social inclusion
and reduction of inequalities. We call for debt cancellation and daring financial policies.
We condemn all forms of discrimination, racism, and lack of human rights. We support
the UN Secretary General’s call for immediate ceasfires globally. We call for a true and
committed and effective global solidarity.”

Justin Derbyshire, CEO of HelpAge International:

“COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on older people and those with disabilities and
underlying health conditions, who also face serious social and economic consequences
from the pandemic. It highlights the importance of a whole-of-society approach to
deliver well-resourced health and social protection systems that respond to all ages. This
is an urgent healthcare emergency that shines a glaring light on the underlying fragility
and inequalities of our societies and the critical need for stronger, more resilient and
equitable systems, as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Lysa John, Secretary General of CIVICUS:

“Inequalities have exacerbated the challenges facing many populations during this global
pandemic, it is essential that any stimulus and rescue packages must include
commitments and measures to ensure universal health and social care, gender equality
and a global commitment to universal social protection. At the same time, it is critical
that as part of the recovery, every country meets their obligations under the Paris
Agreement; putting us firmly on the path to net zero, with global heating limited to 1.5C
above pre-industrial levels. To achieve the above, meaningful partnerships with Civil
Society are vital. We urge decision makers to involve Civil Society in policy responses and
create enabling conditions for our participation.”

Memory Kachambwa, Executive Director of the African Women’s Development and
Communication Network (FEMNET):

“Women play an outsized role in the COVID-19 response. They constitute 70% of the
world’s health care workforce and recognising that they are workers who are on the
frontlines of responding to this health emergency, they must be adequately,
appropriately and properly protected and supported to cope with the multiple impacts.
At the same time, women’s traditional role as caregivers for sick family members is
putting more women and girls at greater risk of infection and increasing the burden of
care work. Women particularly from the Global South are engaged in informal work, with
poor social security and are among the most affected during this pandemic.

Past health emergencies have caused a disruption in routine health services such as access to
sexual and reproductive health products and services, access to vaccines programmes, and
the provision of quality maternal care—this disruption of services has grave consequences to millions of lives. We call on governments to safeguard the provision of essential health services through strong primary healthcare systems and universal healthcare systems that are inclusive of sexual and reproductive health services during and post this COVID-19 crisis. Governments must include service providers working on ending gender-based violence as essential services."

In summary as world leaders begin to map a way forward out of the crisis, the groups call on them to ensure the approach to recovery is guided by the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals. They insist that: "We need a major economic stimulus that underpins a new social contract between people, governments and the market, that radically reduces inequality, gender inequalities and lays the foundations for a just, equal and sustainable economy that works for all people at every stage of their lives."

**Notes for Editors:**

Full set of 12 points are as follows:

The UN to:

1. Connect immediate response and recovery funding directly with local groups which includes a ‘gender marker’ for women, marginalized people, community organisations and social enterprises to ensure we leave no one behind
2. Safeguard freedom of expression and support innovative approaches to digital freedom of assembly to ensure all voices are heard
3. Promote the global ceasefire and support governments to re-direct military spending to social protection
4. Call for a ban on the live wild animal trade and a halt to deforestation

In the short term ‘response’ phase, Member state governments and donor agencies to:

5. Safeguard healthcare workers and social care workers on the frontline by ensuring they have access to safe and decent working conditions and are resourced properly
6. Involve civil society organisations in policy and operational responses to COVID-19
7. Uphold financial and policy commitments to a human rights based approach, in particular the rights of older people, persons with disabilities and women, girls and gender diverse people
8. Implement clear social and environmental conditions on any emergency financial stimulus to companies, such as treating workers fairly and cutting carbon emissions

In the medium term ‘recovery’ phase, Member state governments and donor agencies to:

9. Drive a seismic shift towards universal healthcare, welfare payments and social protection that include essential services such as vaccine programs, sexual and reproductive health products and services for all
10. Cancel national debts to ensure sufficient finance is available to governments to ensure a just recovery
11. Adopt fairer taxation policies on those who hold the most resources in our society, alongside measures to tackle illicit financial flows to pay for these protections

12. Put in place incentives for a feminist, green industrial revolution to enable rapid scaling up of sustainable jobs

For more information, please go to www.covidcitizenaction.org

Covid citizen action: Standing Together in the face of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Contact:

- Tanja Gohlert, Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), tanja.gohlert@gcap.global
- Oli Henman, Action for Sustainable Development, oli.henman@action4sd.org

See also GCAP’s COVID-19 response page.