

## Building blocks of an agenda for systemic change

Governments have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with unprecedented intensity. They have taken far-reaching regulatory measures to contain the pandemic and mobilized financial resources on an enormous scale. They have thus demonstrated that they are capable of action and need not leave the driver's seat to the markets and the private sector if the political will is there.

In countless statements most governments have also affirmed that a return to business-as-usual after the crisis is not an option. Instead, the UN call to “build back better” has become a leitmotif of the multilateral responses to the COVID-19 crisis. But does “building back” really lead to the urgently needed systemic change?

Many COVID-19 emergency programmes and stimulus packages contain certain social and environmental components. But they do not go far enough and often ignore the structural causes and the interdependencies of the multiple crises.

The continuous destruction and loss of life caused by humanitarian disasters, be it floods in Southeast Asia, the locust plague in East Africa, the explosion in the port of Beirut, raging wildfires in California or the increasing intensity of hurricanes in the Caribbean gulf show that disasters and crises do not stop because of COVID-19. On the contrary, they are all the result of a dysfunctional system that puts corporate profit above the rights and well-being of people and planet.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the World Economic Forum calls for “The Great Reset” to enable

“stakeholder capitalism,” and rightly states that the “inconsistencies, inadequacies and contradictions of multiple systems—from health and financial to energy and education—are more exposed than ever”.<sup>1</sup>

But pushing the reset button just restarts the game, without changing the rules of the game – or even the game itself. The reset button clears the memory and reboots the (old) system, a system that has proven that it could not prevent the current crises, but rather has caused them.

We offer as an alternative an “8 R”-agenda for systemic change.

- Re-value the importance of care in societies.
- Re-empower public services.
- Re-balance global and local value chains.
- Reinforce the shift towards climate justice.
- Re-distribute economic power and resources.
- Re-regulate global finance.
- Re-invent multilateral solidarity.
- Re-define the measures of development and progress.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/great-reset/>

The following eight “R” policy prescriptions do not provide a comprehensive reform programme. Rather, they illustrate in a nutshell eight issue areas where not only policy and governance reforms but also changes in the underlying narrative are long overdue. Action in these areas is a necessary precondition for accelerating progress towards the socio-ecological transformations proclaimed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.