

**Action Agenda Workshop #2; Mobilizing for the Bounce Forward<sup>1</sup>**

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**Key Messages**

- The COVID-19 pandemic can be used as an opportunity to raise awareness and discuss actions to address climate change, planetary health and social and related wildlife inequities
- Actions for change can come from the top-down (United Nations and Federal government actions) or from the bottom-up (Municipal government and community-based initiatives)
- Engagement, support, and collaboration with youth organizations as well as amplifying Indigenous and marginalized voices –all are needed in order to achieve sustainable development in a post COVID world.

**Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic and climate change emergencies have continued to highlight the inequities that exist within our communities. In response, there's now a rapidly expanding demand for change coming both from movements for social equity and for actions on climate change. Embracing the “Build Back Better” mantra from the UN and several national governments, we are striving for a new and better “normal”. The series “Learning and Relearning for Planetary Health: Early Lessons from a Pandemic” was created to inform and share scientific knowledge around climate change and environmental degradation, in the context of COVID-19, and its interconnection with human health. The series also aimed to spark conversations on how to ‘bounce forward and not back’ into a better post-COVID future by fostering dialogues to identify challenges and actionable resolutions. The tenth session of this series was designed as an action agenda workshop for participants to discuss and develop ideas on actionable change on a variety of topics (Takaro et al., 2020).

**The Origins of the Pandemic, Equity & Indigenous Rights**

Zoonotic diseases are infectious diseases that are transmitted from animals to humans. They have been a natural part of humanity's coexistence with nature, but over the past 30 years, constant stress on wildlife (such as habitat destruction) has increased the chances of zoonotic diseases spilling over to humans (Sansonetti, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is an example where a stressed bat population resulted in a bat-pangolin-human spill-over phenomenon

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<sup>1</sup> On June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020, a webinar with the above title, was presented as a contribution to a series on “*Learning and Relearning for Planetary Health*”, on mobilizing for the bounce forward. Participants of this session developed action agendas on five different topics led by moderators in breakout rooms. Introductory presenters were Dr. Barbara Hoffman and Dr. Jon Patz. Moderators for topic discussions were Dr. Mira Ziolo, Dr. Tim Takaro, Dr. Barbara Hoffman, Dr. Kris Ebi, Dr. Maya Gislason, Dr. Jon Patz, and Dr. Trevor Hancock.

The recording of this webinar session as well as the compiled notes of action agendas from each breakout room can be accessed through this webpage <https://learningforplaneta.wixsite.com/website/past-webinars>

(Aguirre, et al., 2020). These spillover phenomena most often occur where both human and wildlife populations are unduly stressed and where the greatest human and natural inequities exist. The reframing of zoonotic origins as an equity issue requires a movement from an 'EGO' perspective (which holds humankind as the highest life form), to an 'ECO' perspective: one that puts humans and wildlife on an equal platform to achieve Multi-Species Equity: “a universal right by all life forms to health and well-being” (Takaro et al., 2020).

Knowledge translation is needed to move towards the ECO perspective by sharing research and create opportunities to integrate animal health knowledge into interdisciplinary learning. To achieve this, the creation of a platform is required to facilitate connections between field researchers and various stakeholders to provide examples of multi-species equity in practice. Further action would consist of strengthening collaborative networks to inform interdisciplinary policy and practice, promote an integrated human and animal-based disease and health surveillance system, and the sharing this knowledge in youth education systems (Takaro et al., 2020).

Alongside wildlife inequities, the pandemic has 'woken up global society' on how our structures have contributed to years of social inequities and injustices within the human communities (Scott, et al., 2020). Not everyone is impacted by the COVID-19 and climate change crises in the same way, and the capitalism crisis is a large barrier towards meaningful change due to its power on economic and political systems. There is urgent need in addressing this as we bounce forward. Actionable items with a bottoms-up approach, include the adoption of a human rights approach and an equity lens across all policy levels to create counter narratives to capitalism. Engagement with local initiatives, particularly of Indigenous and marginalized groups, can build strength and authenticity to the ethical argument. This can further promote collaboration with advocates to create and sign letters to tackle social inequities. The momentum and interconnectedness for change is possible and can be seen worldwide such as in Fridays for the Future or the Sunrise Movement, anti-pipeline protests, advocacy on police brutality and colonization in Canada, and the Black Lives Matter movement in the US among others (Takaro et al., 2020).

### **Climate change, Energy Policy & the UN: Change from the Top Down**

Climate change is also a global public health emergency humankind is currently facing. A report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provides evidence on the severe consequences of a 1.5°C and 2°C rise in global temperature on humans and our ecosystems (IPCC, 2018). To address climate action and planetary health, the United Nations, not surprisingly, has framed the challenge from an international level using the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, since the release of the UN IPCC's “Global Warming of 1.5°C” report that found that greenhouse gas emissions must be cut 45% by the year 2030 to for the world's temperature to stabilize at that level, all world leaders must recognize the urgency of the situation. International governance, e.g., at the upcoming COP 26 meeting must work toward a new agreement that includes accountability across nations. This includes transparent reports of total consumption and emission levels from global militaries, as they are the greatest polluters, emitters, and consumers of petroleum. This issue can employ the help of Non-Governmental Organization speakers to further educate diplomats on transparent reporting (Takaro et al., 2020).

Action from the top down includes climate change mitigation strategies and energy policy that promotes active forms of transportation to reduce emissions and connections with stakeholders

and societies to release action statements. The pandemic has highlighted the effects of air pollution on increased risk of COVID-19 infection (Kapitsinis, 2020; Rice 2020; Balmes 2020), but more public awareness is still needed on the ways climate change significantly impacts our health. Educating health professionals on the environmental determinants of health is also necessary as this can stimulate a health professional movement to help communicate and raise awareness on the urgency to manage climate change through public health messages (Takaro et al., 2020).

### **Municipal & Community-Based Initiatives: Change from the Bottom Up**

A powerful source for change is the collective effort of communities and municipalities that can build momentum and the expansion of actions. Change from the bottom up should be part of the actions against climate change and should also include sustainable actions such as the support for local businesses, low meat diets, and increased active transportation to help transition to a low carbon future which can mitigate climate change and improve our health. In Canada, this transition can be supported through the collaboration of local governments with current action taking place through The Blue Dot campaign, which works to include the right to a healthy environment into the Canadian Constitution. Building healthy environments include actions such as starting urban gardens to promote food security and the development of local food supply chains and guides for hosting green community events. Social connectedness can be done through 'kitchen table' conversations with friends and family on the issues of climate change, to better inform and raise awareness for action. Connection can also occur through workshops with organizations such as Project Drawdown and the coming together to support campaigns that will hold organizations and corporations accountable on their carbon emissions and advocate for reductions in carbon footprints (Takaro et al., 2020).

### **Conclusion**

A common agreement across the different groups that participated in this action agenda workshop was the importance of using the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to discuss and raise awareness of climate change action and existing shared inequity issues. From the start of the pandemic, there has been extensive and rapid government mobilization for a COVID-19 recovery plan. The same urgency is needed to develop a green recovery plan to address global public health emergency of Climate Change. The Green New Deal in Canada is an ongoing project and promising plan that “recognizes the urgency of the climate change crisis...[and] will ensure that a transformation is carried out equitably; rooted in climate justice, and in respect to the rights of Indigenous peoples while creating millions of jobs in the process” (Hancock, 2020, slide 6). We should also consider and support all workers through a just energy transition. We need to support the integration of the resources, ideas and scientific knowledge shared in this series in the creation of a Green New Deal. In addition, to achieve meaningful change, increased cross-disciplinary action is required through collaboration and support of youth engagement. The momentum and mobilization of youth organizations on social and environmental issues is a major driving force for change and an asset to the sharing of research knowledge which can not be overlooked in strategic actions in the bounce forward to a post-COVID recovery (Takaro et al., 2020).

Please stay tuned for the compelling and thought-provoking end to this OpEd series on Indigenous perspectives, communicable disease control, and protection of the rights of all people and non human species.

## References

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