



POLICY  
BRIEF

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# People, Planet, Prosperity

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## Rebuilding differently

BASED ON DISCUSSIONS AT THE 3RD ICRIER-KAS COVID-19 WEBINAR (13 SEPTEMBER 2021)

September 2021



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## About the policy brief

Covid-19 waves continue to wax and wane and impact lives and livelihoods around the world. The 2021 Italian G20 Presidency decided to focus on three broad, interconnected pillars of action – People, Planet, Prosperity – and pave the way for rebuilding differently in the aftermath of the crisis for sustained and shared prosperity.

In this context, the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) and the India Office of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) came together to organize a webinar on “People, Planet, Prosperity: Rebuilding Differently” on 13 September 2021 to analyze some of the key issues discussed in G20 meetings in 2021 and develop recommendations for the G20 Leaders’ Summit, scheduled for 30-31 October 2021. The webinar’s video recording is available on YouTube – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6v92RBleFpU&t=4378s>.

This policy brief is based on discussions at the webinar. The welcome remarks were delivered by Dr Deepak Mishra, Director & Chief Executive, ICRIER. Mr Peter Rimmele, the KAS India Resident Representative, gave an insightful and inspiring introductory address. Dr Ali Mehdi, Senior Visiting Fellow, ICRIER, moderated the thematic session that followed. We had several highly distinguished speakers in this session – Dr Anna-Katharina Hornidge, Director, German Development Institute (DIE), Germany; Dr Peter Taylor, Director of Research, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, UK; Dr Matthew L Bishop, Senior Lecturer, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sheffield, UK; Dr Alok Sheel, RBI Chair Professor in Macroeconomics, ICRIER and former Secretary, Governments of India and Kerala.

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## Introduction

- In the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Italian G20 Presidency has, quite rightly, decided to focus on the three inter-related areas of action – ‘People, Planet, Prosperity’. For co-existence on this planet, focusing on them is central to our shared future. We need to pay significant attention to interrelationships between these areas, if there is to be any real hope for a future which does not leave any one behind.
- Financing for Sustainable Development Goals is off-track to achieve them by 2030. To fill the gap, more public and private sustainable development finance is needed.
- People are central to the SDGs. The pandemic has affected everyone everywhere, but in different ways. Some of the measures taken by governments around the world to tackle Covid-19 are themselves having a major negative impact on those already in danger of being left behind. This is in a context where we are seeing massive global disruptions and shocks in relation to the environment, economy, politics, society, etc.
- At the same time, we are observing a variety of efforts to try to counter these challenges. We see new local and global solidarities and fresh approaches to science and evidence and research. These efforts will be invaluable in responding to future health and other global challenges.
- Some would argue that the changes and challenges to the climate and the environment are even greater, as they are placing unprecedented pressures on planetary life support systems and creating new uncertainties in people’s lives and livelihoods. We are also seeing concerted action at global, national and local levels to respond and adapt to these uncertainties, to try to transform the systems that create environmental vulnerabilities.
- Rapid developments in digital technologies have not been shared equally. These are being used in negative ways, many times to clamp down on citizen voices and protests. Notwithstanding, these technologies are also opening access to health and educational services, offering solutions to societal challenges. They are strengthening democracy and accountability. So, there is a mix of what sometimes seems to be a gloomy picture of the world, but also many examples of the possibility of new visions and aspirations.
- If we aspire to more sustainable and equitable futures, we need to rebuild differently. The pandemic is a crisis of a very different nature and it is shining a spotlight, bringing into sharp focus a range of fissures, cracks and marginalization in societies throughout the world. Although it is still frequently characterized as a health crisis, it is obviously multi-dimensional in nature. It is heightening fragilities, exacerbating inequalities and deepening vulnerabilities in systems of all kinds.

- We need a bold vision for fundamental, transformative, sustainable change. We need to move beyond ‘what is’ to ‘what if’. This is only possible in systems which embrace democracy, transparency, rule of law, fundamental freedoms and equalities.
- Rebuilding differently will not be possible until we start thinking differently. We need intense discussions about our understandings of development and the way forward.
- There were signs that a pandemic of this nature is likely to arise, and unless significant action is taken, we will see other pandemics in the future.
- When it comes to knowledge and evidence, Covid-19 will need collective action and progressive leadership, including from the G20.
- Research funders, researchers, policymakers and practitioners will have to reposition themselves in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and focus on building resilience in systems as well as communities, if we wish to see truly transformational progress.
- We need to find ways to bring together those who are not at the table, those who are most at risk of being left behind, and use agency and voice as push factors to address the political economy that often inhibits change.
- We need to build slack into systems and institutions, which can then be drawn upon in times of crisis. We cannot do this alone or in isolation. We need to work together. We need to join up our efforts. We need to collaborate if we are going to transform development, economies, communities and people’s lives. We need to break out of our bubbles, our echo chambers.
- Rebuilding differently is a long-term mission. It is going to need commitment, energy, resources and collaborative efforts, if all of these aspirations are to become a reality.

## The role of the G20

- This unprecedented crisis is demanding more from G20 members, at home as well as abroad. It is an international forum that is well-placed to play a leading role in enabling a global response to the pandemic, given that its members collectively constitute 80% of the global GDP, 75% of the global trade and 60% of the world population.
- Given its characteristic advantages, the G20 needs to play a much more proactive role in the Covid-19 recovery process going forward. Its members need to realize that the pandemic is a global threat and nationalistic responses are not going to take us too far in securing our populations and economies. We are already seeing that countries with high vaccination rates are not immune to Covid-19 waves. The virus will mutate and come back to haunt us from parts of the world with low vaccination coverage. As the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed, argued – ‘No one will ever be truly safe until everyone is safe’.
- The G20 needs to scale up its ambitions to deliver bolder messages and measures, and enable developing countries in particular to address the crisis effectively.
- There is a perception that the G20 is no longer in a position to take strong action. Its image has been further marred due to its inability to develop a consensus on global vaccine patents in the WTO, despite backing from the US. To address this perception, G20 should think of ways to make adequate quantities of Covid-19 vaccines available to poor nations, about waiving intellectual property rights (IPR) for their manufacture, about global hunger arising from the pandemic and enhancing global growth. In terms of climate change, it should try to agree to more ambitious targets, to limit warming to 1.5°C, at the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow (31 October-12 November 2021). The Rome Summit would be assessed vis-à-vis its commitment on these critical issues.
- The environmental-health nexus (‘One Health’) was not considered seriously earlier. The risk of shifting climate regions, zoonosis, newly emerging infectious diseases, etc., was not adequately appreciated by those initiating and leading discussions in the G20 and other forums. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the significance of One Health. Like the G20 Presidencies since Germany, Italy’s Presidency is rightly focusing on ‘People, Planet, Prosperity’. Risks to these concerns are inter-related, and we need to see and deal with them as such.
- The G20 should see how we can build systems that enable societies to develop early warning systems (EWSs) on the one hand, and social security systems, including health systems, on the other. We need to have the right triggers and sensors in place to be able to foresee the linking of different crises, and develop the capability to be well-prepared to prevent and tackle them quickly and collectively.

- G20 countries also need to invest in the global monitoring of new variants of viruses and bacteria-based diseases, in the capacity-building of national and regional disease control centers and health authorities.
- G20 countries should substantially invest in science systems, and develop a network of science institutes in different climatic zones as well as in different societal contexts, to capture signals for diseases that are unfolding.
- G20 should consider the model of Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), agriculture research institutes, for a network of pharmaceutically-oriented as well as applied research institutes which can co-develop and contribute to the production of vaccines and also invest in R&D.
- We need to move out of the discourse where we have those who demand intellectual property rights protection and those who oppose it for reasons of public health. The G20 should foster a voluntary pool in which companies could offer their intellectual capacities for not just vaccine development, but also production and diffusion across the value-chain.
- The remit of the G20 should be widened to encompass every area of globalization. It should effectively become the overarching, monitoring and coordinating organization for all areas of globalization. Part of the role would involve discovering and resolving conflicts and pressure points between international agencies with specific remits.
- While widening, its broad remit for oversight needs to have an extremely narrow and highly focused view of what it can actually do, better than any existing body, and that is simply to steer and coordinate. It should not be a policy development organization; it should not be the one that takes initiatives in terms of determining, apart from the broad direction of travel that the political leadership thinks should be adopted. Its job should be to resolve conflicts and tensions, and ensure that the work happening in different areas is on course. Broadly, G20's role should be to coordinate, and to make sure that globalization works better, essentially for people, the planet and the prosperity of all.
- The G20 can be impactful only by having a narrow focus. Their initial communiqués were short, focused and action was taken. Increasingly, they became a laundry list. It has become difficult to even read the whole communiqué and what has been decided in previous G20 summits. New items keep getting added, and they have, in this sense, lost focus. The G20 needs to have a narrower focus on big issues. Presently, it is doing too much of a micromanagement of the Bretton Woods institutions. The latter make recommendations, the G20 welcomes them, and leaves it at that. That is another test for the G20 – whether the leaders are merely going to welcome the reports of these institutions, or are they going to take action and operationalize them.



## Lessons from India

- The pandemic has highlighted the importance of international cooperation as well as the role that India can play in it. India has a consistent track record of commitment to work responsibly in concert with the international community, and in conformity with established rules, norms and principles of multilateralism. Therefore, the world looks at India as a compelling, credible and trustworthy major power to play a strategic role in the post Covid-19 global recovery process.
- Last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had called for a new global index for post-corona world, comprising 4 key elements – creation of a vast pool of talent; ensuring that technology reaches all segments of society; transparency in governance systems; and dealing with Mother Earth in a spirit of Trusteeship. He argued that based on this, the G20 can lay the foundation for a new world. It could be presented as one of India's proposals to the G20 for rebuilding differently in the aftermath of the crisis.
- India has known strengths in information technology, artificial intelligence, etc., and this is something that it should bring to the G20 table.
- India has set a strong example, as the only country among G20 nations that is on track towards meeting what it had promised as part of the 2015 Paris Agreement, in terms of being the only 2 degree compatible country. India should highlight its achievement to emphasize a sustainable path for the Covid-19 recovery process, that is sensitive to the planet, while taking care of people and prosperity.
- India should also focus on intellectual property rights and vaccines during pandemics, considering that it is a global vaccine manufacturing hub.
- India is the Co-chair, with Canada, of the G20 framework for strong, sustainable and balanced growth, which has from the very beginning been one of its flagship working groups. That is something India can emphasize during its G20 Presidency as a follow-up to the Italian focus on 'People, Planet, Prosperity'.
- India should highlight its *langar*<sup>1</sup> model, a crisis response mechanism that has already produced considerable international goodwill and can be leveraged for mainstreaming the role of the civil society alongside that of the State.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Langar' is a community kitchen of a Sikh gurdwara that serves free meals to all. The kitchen is maintained and serviced by Sikh community volunteers (<https://bit.ly/39PuT4H>, 30/9/2021, 18:32 hours).



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