Lesson 6: Healthy and Green Recovery from COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic represents the greatest global shock the world has faced in decades. Millions of people’s health has been affected and millions have lost their lives. The loss of lives and livelihoods, and the associated economic crisis, widespread loss of employment and income, is damaging health and sustainable development around the planet. Continued mismanagement of natural resources and ecosystems that support our lives will only reinforce the existing challenges.

However, in adversity there is opportunity. Decisions made by countries and governments in the coming months to recover from COVID-19 can leave behind long-term damaging patterns, promote sustainable development and lead to a greener, healthier and more equal world.

In this lesson, we will explore:

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our health and our societies;
- The six prescriptions in the WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19; and
- The actionables – practical steps for implementing the WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19.
Introduction

Welcome to Lesson 6 of the Climate Change Negotiations and Health course.

Let’s begin our journey by watching a short introductory video (check online lesson)

Visit the interactive [WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard](https://www.who.int) for latest information on the current global situation.

The world cannot afford recurrent crises on the scale of COVID-19, whether they are caused by new pandemics, or from the impacts of climate change, natural resource exploitation and ecosystem disruption.

Going back to “normal” will not be enough. In the long run, the way societies respond to and recover from this pandemic will likely have a bigger impact on public health than COVID-19 itself, as it will shape the environmental and social determinants of health for generations.
COVID-19 and Natural Resource Degradation

The number of infectious diseases that have spread from wildlife to humans is increasing. SARS and Ebola are just some examples. Scientific evidence seems to indicate that COVID-19 also is of animal origin.

Zoonotic diseases are largely driven by environmental degradation due to:

- Climate change
- Pollution
- Overexploitation of natural resources
- Land degradation
- Wildlife exploitation
- Other stresses.
“The pandemic is a reminder of the intimate and delicate relationship between people and planet. Any efforts to make our world safer are doomed to fail unless they address the critical interface between people and pathogens, and the existential threat of climate change that is making our Earth less habitable.”

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General,
Address to the 73rd World Health Assembly. May 18th 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown what can happen when the delicate equilibrium between people and planet is affected.

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So, how can we ensure that COVID-19 response and recovery measures are healthy and green? Let’s find out in the next segment.

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The WHO Manifesto: Prescriptions

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What is the "WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19", and what does it aim to achieve? Watch the video to find out: WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19 - YouTube

The WHO Manifesto provides six prescriptions (and over 80 accompanying actionables) for a healthy recovery from COVID-19. Let's dig deeper into each of the six prescriptions.

**Introduction**

The WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19 offers a set of six prescriptions to promote the creation of healthier environments for the wellbeing of people and societies.
Prescription 1 - Protect and Preserve the Source of Human Health: Nature

The environment provides services that are essential to human life and health, such as clean air, freshwater, and food. In turn, human economies are heavily dependent on natural resources.

However, pressure from human activities, ranging from pollution to deforestation, has a negative impact on the services and benefits we derive from nature. This can also lead to the development of infectious diseases in humans – over 60% of which come from animals, particularly livestock and wildlife.

It is therefore important not only to focus on early identification and control of diseases, but also to reduce our footprint on the environment.

Prescription 2 - Invest in Essential Services, from Water and Sanitation to Clean Energy in Healthcare Facilities

Access to basic services, such as water and sanitation facilities and services as well as sound management of waste, is needed to protect human health. These services should be available in all hospitals and health care structures, together with reliable energy sources and protection for health workers.

Environmental and occupational risks are linked to around 25% of all global deaths.
Also, safeguarding the environment has proved to offer both essential protection against future disease and very positive returns for the entire society.

**Prescription 3 - Promote a Quick Healthy Energy Transition**

More than 90% of the world population breathe polluted air, mostly resulting from the burning of fossil fuels that cause climate change. One in eight of all global deaths per year (i.e. over 7 million deaths) are linked to air pollution.

Investing in clean energy can provide benefits both for people’s health and the environment. In addition to reducing air pollution and contributing to reaching the goal of the Paris Agreement, it has been estimated that the health gains of a rapid transition to clean energy would repay the investment twice over.

**Prescription 4 – Promote Healthy, Sustainable Food Systems**

The consumption of unhealthy food as well as the lack of food are the largest cause
of diseases and ill health worldwide. Agricultural practices, particularly the clearing of land to breed livestock, are associated with around one-fourth of all greenhouse gases (GHG). In addition, land use change is considered the largest environmental driver of new disease outbreaks.

Therefore, the adoption of healthier and more sustainable diets is urgently needed.

**Prescription 5 - Build Healthy, Livable Cities**

Cities are the home of more than half of the world’s population and drive over 60% of both economic activity and GHG emissions. Given the density and saturation, moving within a city may be often more efficient when using public transportation, or when walking or cycling. Such practices can help to reduce emissions, air pollution, road injuries as well as the 3 million annual death associated with physical inactivity.

With a view to enhance economies and quality of life, many large and dynamic cities have already created new spaces for pedestrians and bicycles to circulate while maintaining the distancing required by the COVID-19 crisis.

**Prescription 6 - Stop Using Taxpayers Money to Fund Pollution**

The world is at a decision point. Using taxpayers’ money to promote unsustainable
consumption patterns and polluting industries subsidizes death and destruction. To rebuild economies affected by the COVID-19, new financial reforms are needed.

Around USD 400 billion collected through taxes are spent globally every year on fossil fuel subsidies, driving climate change and air pollution. If the costs to human health and the environment are considered, the value of the subsidies reaches over USD 5 trillion per year, more than is spent by all governments in the world on health care.

Instead, putting a price on fossil fuels that reflects the damage they cause could reduce air pollution deaths by half, cut GHG emission by more than a quarter, and bring revenues corresponding to 4% of the global GDP.

**Summary**

Implementing the prescriptions in the WHO Manifesto will have positive effects both on health and the environment. Governments, national and local policymakers and a wide array of other actors can build on them to take decisive steps in creating a more sustainable world.

In the next segment, we will discuss how policymakers can implement the WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19.
The WHO Manifesto: Actionables

The COVID-19 recovery presents a unique opportunity for improving health and re-shaping our relationship with the environment. To achieve these goals, the WHO Manifesto for a healthy recover from COVID-19 also provides "actionables", i.e. an extensive set of concrete steps for implementing the six prescriptions.

Although the selection and prioritization of the actionables depends on the context, their implementation will contribute to alleviating the global environmental burden of disease, which causes 13 million premature deaths a year – or a quarter of all deaths worldwide.

Let's look at some examples of the actionables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Climate Change</strong></th>
<th><strong>Air Pollution</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mitigate climate change by reducing GHG emissions and other climate changing pollutants, for example through better energy-use choices, agricultural practices, transport, food, city compactness and industrial technology use and practices.</td>
<td>Develop coherent multi-sectoral policies and actions across transport, industry, power generation, waste and wastewater management, agriculture, housing and land use sectors for preventing air pollution. Also develop and implement policies to ensure clean fuels and technologies for cooking, heating and lighting in households.</td>
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<th><strong>Sanitation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Clean Energy</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Develop and implement multi-sectoral sanitation policies which include sanitation safety planning, treatment of faecal sludge and wastewater, and reuse in agriculture.</td>
<td>Provide and use clean and safe cooking, heating and lighting solutions.</td>
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<td>Healthy, Safe and Resilient Workplaces for All</td>
<td>Sustainable Food Systems</td>
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<td>Implement national policies and action plans on occupational safety and health.</td>
<td>Strengthen local food production and processing, especially by smallholder and family farmers, where appropriate.</td>
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<th>City Design</th>
<th>Cross-cutting Actions</th>
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<td>Integrate health into urban planning policies to deliver highly connected, mixed-use and compact neighbourhoods that are economically and socially viable and that promote active living, sustainable mobility, energy efficiency, healthy diets and access to essential services.</td>
<td>Strengthen and support implementation of the Health in All Policies approach at the national and subnational level.</td>
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**AND YOU?**

**WHAT WILL YOU DO TO PROMOTE A HEALTHY AND GREEN RECOVERY?**

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In the next segment, we will recap the key points covered in the lesson.
Recap

➢ Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, caused by a new coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2, has sent a massive shockwave across societies and economies around the world and resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which is a zoonotic disease, has shown what can happen when the delicate equilibrium between people and planet is affected.

However, a healthy and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will help to protect our health in the future, while addressing climate change and promoting greener economies.

➢ The WHO Manifesto: Prescriptions and Actionables

The WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19, with its six prescriptions and accompanying practical steps (actionables), provides substantive guidance and support to governments, national and local decision-makers as well as a wide range of other actors in building a greener, healthier and fairer world while sustaining the economy hit by the effects of the pandemic.

The six prescriptions in the WHO Manifesto are as follows:

1. Protect and preserve the source of human health: Nature
2. Invest in essential services, from water and sanitation to clean energy in healthcare facilities
3. Ensure a quick healthy energy transition
4. Promote healthy, sustainable food systems
5. Build healthy, livable cities
6. Stop using taxpayers’ money to fund pollution.
Check Your Understanding

1. Fill in the Blank
SARS, Ebola and COVID-19 are all examples of __________ diseases.

2. Fill in the Blank
To enable a healthy and green recovery from COVID-19, the WHO Manifesto offers __________ prescriptions, with accompanying actionable steps for implementation.

3. Which of the following are prescriptions included in the WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19?

   a. Limit sugar intake and promote increased physical activity
   b. Invest in essential services
   c. Promote a quick healthy energy transition
   d. Stop using taxpayers’ money to fund pollution.

Answers:

1. Zoonotic
2. Six
3. b, c, d
Useful Resources

- WHO Manifesto for a Healthy Recovery from COVID-19
- WHO Manifesto Actionables