



Mountain gorilla in Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda. Credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI

# The environmental implications of the Covid-19 pandemic

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In 2019, a National Security Risk Assessment briefing for the UK government highlighted the danger from a pandemic as 'very high' and warned of potentially catastrophic economic and social impacts. Those warnings were sadly prescient. Eight weeks after being declared a global pandemic Covid-19 has so far caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, several million infections and pushed the global economy into a recession to rival the Great Depression. But that same assessment also mistakenly assessed the likely environmental impact as zero. Whilst initial focus has rightly been on the huge impacts on health and

economy, the pandemic also has serious repercussions for the environment. Many of these are intrinsically linked and will potentially exacerbate those very health and economic impacts.

This paper identifies some of the more immediately visible impacts, explores the extent to which we can apply lessons from the pandemic to other environmental threats and suggests ways in which environmentalists could join with other disciplines to realise shared visions for 'building back better' into the future.

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## **A CRISIS CAN BE AN OPPORTUNITY, AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC COULD BE AN OPPORTUNITY LIKE NO OTHER**

*“You never want a serious crisis to go to waste. And what I mean by that is an opportunity to do things that you think you could not do before.”*

Rahm Emanuel, Chief of staff to Barack Obama

Crises bring pain and suffering to many and the initial responses rightly focus on mitigating those impacts. But at the same time, crises represent unique opportunities for change. Some of the most significant changes in recent history – from the US New Deal and the UK's National Health Service to the rise of free market approaches following inflation in the 1970s – were catalysed by crises. Identifying and mitigating the immediate impacts of the pandemic on health, the economy, society and the environment is important, but we must simultaneously learn from the experience and engender positive change for the future.

The impacts of Covid-19 are going to be vast, and will be disproportionately shouldered by some of the most vulnerable sections of society. No cure has been found and the risk of future infection waves is unknown. Furthermore, the initial impacts – both physical

and mental – are likely to be compounded and exacerbated by the economic ramifications. The IMF is projecting a global economic contraction to rival that of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Bank of England is forecasting the deepest recession in 300 years. Like the health impacts, the economic impacts will be felt hardest by more vulnerable sections of society. Impacts were initially projected to be slightly lower for developing countries, but resilience to economic shocks in such countries is also significantly lower, making overall impacts potentially much higher. The nature of the economic crisis also differs from previous economic shocks; Covid-19 has physically shut down economies by preventing people from working. It is not an economic crisis that can be addressed through confidence rebuilding or financial stimulus and it will not be possible to just pick up where we left off if and when the virus recedes.

But Covid-19 is not 'only' a health or an economic crisis. The pandemic originated from an environmental crisis, its management is being hindered by a political crisis, its impacts are being exacerbated by a social crisis and the whole system is driven by a globalised economic framework that is deeply flawed and arguably unsustainable. With every person on the planet susceptible to infection, the ubiquity of exposure means the impacts are likely to extend much further and deeper than the immediate implications of loss of life and an economic crash - they are likely to extend to our society as a whole, to our politics, to our environment, to our culture and to our psyche. The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to be the most significant disruption in living memory and is making us question almost every aspect of the way we were living.

Crises often reveal both the best and the worst in humanity, and examples of both are already clearly on display in response to Covid-19. On the one hand, we have witnessed antagonistic and racist rhetoric, power grabs and profiteering. Flaws in our system have been laid bare, exemplified by the absurdity of airlines flying large numbers of empty or near-empty planes for the sole purpose of protecting their slots on prime routes. Conversely, the pandemic has instilled in us an appreciation of what is important – spending time with families, the value of key workers, social interaction and communities. Community groups have rallied to support neighbours, a call for volunteer assistants was oversubscribed, organisations and companies have cooperated to manufacture protective

equipment. People are questioning the values of individualism, exceptionalism and the freedom to do whatever you want. There have been numerous philanthropic responses and various companies have gone beyond the call of duty to support workers or charity groups.

We are in uncharted waters. Decisions are being taken and behaviour changed in ways that would have been unthinkable just weeks before. People have readily accepted new norms of working, travelling and meeting. Experts and science are once again seen as trusted sources. Governments have deviated from 'normal' policy. Furthermore, the speed of decision-making and the rapid results achieved are flying in the face of traditional arguments that policies were unfeasible, or could not be implemented quickly. For example, the UK effectively removed homelessness from the streets – an issue that has been a long standing problem - with a single decision.

The result is that Covid-19 is driving a massive shift in thinking. Almost anything is possible, almost everything is feasible, as illustrated by the diversity of voices now calling for change. Even traditionally conservative, business-orientated mouthpieces such as the Financial Times are stating that 'radical reforms are needed for a social contract that benefits everyone.' The implications of the pandemic for society are likely to be far-reaching and permanent. Normality is being rewritten. What the new normal will look like is for us to determine.



# THE IMMEDIATE IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE PANDEMIC ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

The environmental impacts of the pandemic, and how those working in environmental conservation and restoration should be responding, are still unfolding, but six immediate implications are already clear:

## 1. Raised awareness of the relationship between nature and human health

Particular emphasis is being placed on the relationship between nature and disease. Covid-19 is a zoonosis – a human disease originating in animals. It is thought to have come from bats and possibly pangolins and spread to humans at a 'wet market' in Wuhan Province in China where live wild animals were being traded. The relationship between animals and human disease is well recognised. 60% of emerging infectious diseases come from animals, domestic or wild. 75% of the most recent outbreaks originated from wild species. Domesticated animals, primates and bats are the most common sources of zoonoses, but endangered species threatened by habitat loss and over-exploitation are also important sources, with hunting and trade exacerbating this risk. Examples of recent zoonoses include HIV (from sooty mangabeys and chimpanzees in West Africa, 1980s), avian 'flu (from chickens in Hong Kong, 1997), West Nile virus (from mosquitoes and birds, New York, 1999), SARS (from civets and bats in China, 2002), MERS (potentially camels, Saudi Arabia, 2012), Zika virus (mosquitoes, South America, 2013) and Ebola (multiple vectors including bats, primates and porcupines, West Africa, 2014). Transmission of disease between wildlife and humans is not a one-way process. Various species can catch diseases from humans and there is concern that endangered ape populations may be at risk from human transmission of Covid-19. How transmission occurs depends on various factors, many of which are also environmental. Land-use change, changes in agricultural practices, climate change and bushmeat consumption all combine with factors such as international travel and human behaviour to drive zoonosis epidemics. But in general, intact, biologically

rich ecosystems are better at containing disease, whereas disrupted ecosystems are more likely to promote transmission. Covid-19 is the latest, and most serious, zoonosis to arise in recent years, but it was not the first, will not be the last and – according to experts – is likely to be less serious than some of the diseases that could follow.

The relationship goes deeper, however. Conservationists and human health experts have long recognised multiple links between environmental and human health, not just through disease but also through pollution control, mental health and many other relationships. There is a growing recognition that humans will stay healthy only if they conduct their economic activities within the physical limits that ensure the health of the natural systems on which they ultimately depend. Recent improvements in global health have only been achieved by re-mortgaging the health of future generations for the economic benefit of this one. This pandemic is arguably an example of the price paid by the current generation for the benefits enjoyed by previous generations.

Even before the pandemic had started, environmental and health experts were calling for action to increase cross-sectoral investment in the global human, livestock, wildlife, plant and ecosystem health infrastructure and international funding mechanisms for the protection of ecosystems, commensurate with the critical nature of emerging infectious disease threats to life on our planet. The UN has since called for an expanded definition of health to include all its social, environmental and commercial determinants. Similarly, the German

Environment Minister has noted, 'science tells us that the destruction of ecosystems makes disease outbreaks including pandemics more likely. Conversely, good nature conservation policy that protects our diverse ecosystems is a vital preventive health care measure against new diseases.' Rather than reacting to each crisis separately, we need to address the underlying factors that are making them increasingly likely, including biodiversity loss and climate change.

To what extent will increased awareness lead to change? China initially responded with a permanent ban on wildlife trade for food and a temporary ban on wildlife trade in general, with Vietnam following suit, although China is

already indicating it intends to relax this soon and markets in Africa remain open, albeit with reduced trade. Two hundred organisations signed an open letter to the WHO to recommend governments ban wet markets, address the threats to human health from wildlife trade, ban the inclusion of wildlife in the definition of traditional medicine and promote alternative forms of protein to bushmeat. Some are calling for an extension of this to cover all wildlife trade. Others, including FFI, are arguing for a more nuanced approach that recognises wider issues. Knee-jerk bans can backfire on the environment, and responses need to contribute to – and not detract from – the livelihoods of the world's most vulnerable people.

## 2. Reduced environmental awareness, capacity and oversight in almost every other aspect

2020 was meant to be a crucial year for the environment revolving around several key events. These included the climate COP26 in Glasgow, the CBD COP15 in Kunming, China, a UN conference on oceans and a new oceans biodiversity treaty and the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille. All have now been postponed. Face-to-face UN climate meetings are on hold indefinitely. China has formally dropped many of its green 'ecological civilisation' goals to focus on economic recovery. The EU is now pausing action on its Biodiversity and Farm to Fork strategies with Poland and the Czech Republic calling for a complete dropping of the Green Deal and the Scottish government has delayed publication of its Climate Change Plan. A similar pattern is

emerging among companies and their attitude to environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance. One survey showed that seven out of ten businesses were planning to mothball sustainability announcements or initiatives.

Some of the decisions by governments and companies are arguably more exploitative, using the crisis to profit from environmentally harmful decisions. Behaviour labelled by Naomi Klein as 'disaster capitalism' is already evident. Pressure from the US petroleum lobby has already resulted in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announcing it does not expect compliance with routine monitoring and reporting of pollution and will not pursue



penalties during the pandemic period. The Trump administration has also rolled back legislation requiring car manufacturers to produce more fuel-efficient vehicles. Several groups are using the crisis to promote anti-environmental messages across social media. In Europe, vested interests are lobbying against green stimulus packages, arguing climate change is not an immediate threat to humanity. The plastics industry is also using the crisis to lobby for the return of single-use plastic bags. Meanwhile, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) is seeking amendments to the aviation carbon offset scheme, already criticised for not being ambitious enough to

meet Paris Agreement targets. In July, a major decision on deep-sea mining is due, potentially opening an area larger than the size of Mexico to exploitation despite massive environmental concerns. Indonesia has declared that timber exports no longer need proof they come from legally verified sources. Brazil has also scaled back environmental monitoring in the Amazon.

At the same time, capacity within the organisations that promote environmental causes has been falling. Charities everywhere are facing a funding crisis. In Africa there are reports of ranger capacity falling, national parks closing and poaching rising as a result.

### 3. Shifted baselines on environmental normality

One of the most visible and reported implications of the pandemic for the environment was the immediate fall in pollution levels and the increased visibility of nature in response to the ceasing of economic activity. China saw a fall in coal use that was associated with an estimated 25% fall in carbon dioxide emissions and has recorded a considerable improvement in air quality across over 300 cities. Hong Kong saw a one-third reduction in air pollution. Similar falls have been recorded in Europe. Changes in water pollution have also been reported, with the canals of Venice already appearing cleaner and clearer.

Wildlife is more visible, birdsong more audible, and nature potentially more appreciated. Sightings of wildlife have included pumas in Santiago, wild boar in Barcelona, penguins in Cape Town, turtles in Thailand and Brazil and hedgehogs in the UK. The increased interest in accessing nature in response to isolation and self-distancing is accentuated by our reduced ability to access nature as part of the lockdown. In the UK, the prime minister initially urged people unable to work to enjoy nature, and the RSPB and National Trust made access to their sites free. This led to record visitor numbers at many of the country's top nature spots and a rapid reversal of advice and the closing of most areas.

Unfortunately, history tells us that neither the reduced levels of pollution nor the higher levels of nature visibility are likely to last once the economic restrictions are lifted. The Spanish global flu pandemic of 1918-19 saw production and carbon emissions fall by 14% then, in 1920, rise by 16%. During the financial crisis of 2008 global carbon emissions fell by 2% but then subsequently rose by 5-6%. The extent of the 'bounce back' will largely depend on how countries decide to structure their economic stimulus packages (see below).

However, we could see a reversal of the 'shifting baseline syndrome', which describes the phenomenon whereby people become used to new, poorer conditions and no longer recognise them as different from, or strive to return to, conditions enjoyed in the past. Could it be possible that this tantalising glimpse of a lower pollution, lower car density, higher nature visibility environment (and the rapid timeframe in which it could be achieved) will encourage people to strive for better once the pandemic has passed? This widespread experience of craving, and then being denied, access to nature may serve to support arguments that nature plays a vital role in mental health and well-being.



Large-scale mining within a forest landscape. Credit: Roel Stortweg

#### 4. The implications for environmentally relevant business

Businesses are set to be hit hard by the pandemic and the recession that will follow. The inevitable shake-up will force some companies to completely re-evaluate business models, supply chains, social contracts and redefine working practices and consumption, with potentially major positive or negative implications for the environment. Some should see it as an opportunity for reform - a wake-up call to address the record low levels of trust in business and reform business models to be fit for a low-carbon future. With public scrutiny of company behaviour particularly high, actions such as the distribution of cash back to shareholders, are now being openly criticised, with airlines singled out for their hypocrisy in paying large dividends while simultaneously requesting government bail-outs.

Ideally, the crisis would spur companies into aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals, using science-based targets to reduce their emissions and investing in nature-based solutions to safeguard natural capital. At the very least, some of the stimulus packages launched in response to the crisis will provide incentives for companies (with investor support) to start exploring sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels.

The initial response by some companies to the pandemic was to put Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) on the back burner and focus on more immediate concerns relating

to workers and revenue, but its relevance is beginning to hit home. An interesting question is whether companies that perform well on ESG are also the ones proving most resilient to the crisis? ESG-focused investments have apparently been out-performing conventional funds on both sides of the Atlantic in the first quarter of 2020, partly due to the fall in oil and gas stock. If the trend continues throughout the pandemic period it will increase support for ESG reporting and regulation. There is also anecdotal evidence that companies certified to operate sustainably are reaping the benefits of having environmentally and socially responsible business models during the crisis. These developments should help to shift corporate attitudes towards what has typically been regarded as an unwelcome distraction.

The rise of renewable energy and the relative decline of fossil fuel energy has been one of the key trends in recent years. The oil and gas industry has been one of the heaviest hit by the pandemic. Global oil demand and the price of oil have plummeted. But renewables have also been affected, reliant as they are on massive capital expenditure, which has dried up. Fiscal stimuli are urgently needed to maintain the momentum of the green energy transition, focus economic rebuilding on renewables and put paid once and for all to our reliance on fossil fuels. Failure to do so would set back the transition several years – time that we can ill afford.

## 5. The implications for environmental decision-making in public policy-making

Governments worldwide have been forced to take central stage during the pandemic. Some, particularly those in Asia and those led by women, have risen to the challenge admirably. Many are expanding their influence into areas well beyond the normal remit of government. This is also the kind of leadership required to address many of the environmental challenges we face.

The most immediate decision with relevance to the environment relates to economic stimulus packages that are in preparation worldwide, with US\$5 trillion expected to be spent by the G20 alone. Our current economic system is not designed for the kind of massive investment in new infrastructure required to ensure transition to the low carbon economy to which most countries have committed under the Paris Agreement. The fiscal flexibility engendered by the pandemic is clearly a unique opportunity to promote investment in green infrastructure. A range of green initiatives are now available, should governments choose to invest in them. This is an ideal opportunity to incentivise energy efficiency, to choose not to use public funds to support business activities that are incompatible with the Paris Climate Agreement, and to make payments to others conditional on making the necessary commitments.

There are ominous signs: the US\$2tn stimulus package had all of its 'green' conditions stripped out and included significant unconditional support for polluting industries; in Canada, the first fiscal support packages announced include support for the oil and gas and cruise ship industries. A similar pattern is emerging in Europe: despite being a vocal proponent of climate-smart approaches, the Bank of England has included oil company debts in its bond scheme; in the wider EU, Poland and the Czech Republic have called for the Green Deal to be dropped, although pressure subsequently ensured

that a commitment to sustainable growth and the integration of green initiatives are preconditions for any recovery package. If we are to avoid a situation in which environmental pressure backfires, it will be essential to ensure that messaging is positive, focusing on what we want to build rather than what we want to prevent.

Covid-19 has magnified many existing problems but has also proved that governments can, and have been allowed to, take decisive action. The financial crisis, which highlighted many of the same issues, did not result in major change; instead, it led to a doubling down on the same issues that arguably caused the problems. Whether Covid-19 will be significant enough to catalyse a different government response that benefits the environment and society as a whole remains to be seen.



Wind turbines. Credit: Zhang Fenshang/Unsplash

## 6. Environmental implications of the hidden social impacts

One undeniable feature of the pandemic is that the poor are hit disproportionately hard, at both an individual and national level. Poorer people are more vulnerable to sickness and death, more affected by the lockdown and self-isolation, and tend to benefit least from the economic interventions. At a national level, poorer countries – where many of the key environmental challenges lie – potentially face much larger risks from the pandemic due to lower resources and capacity to address the challenges. In many countries, debt repayments necessarily take precedence over healthcare investment. Others are highly dependent on sectors that have been devastated, such as tourism. According to the WHO, almost 30% of countries have no national Covid-19 preparedness response plans and only half have a national infection prevention and control programme. Sierra Leone, for example, has one ventilator.

The lower capacity of developing countries to monitor the spread of the virus means the extent of the crisis in such places is yet to be fully understood. The short-term consequence will almost certainly be an increase in inequality, which was already at record levels, with substantial impacts on both people and their environment. In many countries there has already been mass migration from cities back to rural areas and a return to subsistence lifestyles, including clearance for agriculture and bushmeat hunting. Resources for environmental protection are already under enormous pressure in most countries and it is likely even these will be shifted to deal with the more immediate demands of health and security.

## COVID-19 AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Preparing for crises involves *“telling governments what they don’t want to know, to spend money they don’t have, on something they don’t think will happen.”*

Prof. David Alexander, UCL

How can we use Covid-19 as a lesson for addressing other environmental risks, such as climate change? The pandemic is, at its core, the result of an environmental crisis and, like climate change, biodiversity loss and the other concerns of environmentalists, it is a systemic threat tangled up with multiple issues.

Contrary to the claims of some commentators, Covid-19 was perfectly foreseeable. As with climate change, biodiversity loss, soil loss and ocean acidification, the pandemic was clearly imagined by a wide range of experts, with copious data and forecasts outlining exactly how it would happen. In 2015, Bill Gates delivered a prescient Ted Talk on pandemics and our lack of preparedness. A pandemic has featured as a level 5 (out of 5) threat on the UK’s National Risk Register since 2007, and rated as 10-100 times more likely than biological or nuclear attack. In 2009, the UK Labour government assessed risk preparedness for a pandemic almost identical to Covid-19 and noted the limited capacity to expand critical care and a tenfold shortfall of ventilator beds.

Just like other environmental threats, the level of preparation undertaken by countries in response to this well-described and quantified threat was also woefully inadequate. The USA was the highest scoring country in terms of readiness for a pandemic, but has been one of the least prepared to respond, in part due to a failure to roll out testing and in part due to the abandonment of science at the highest level of government, including the closing of the pandemic-preparedness office in 2018. At the time of writing the USA has over 1.6 million cases and more than 94,000 deaths, making it the most heavily affected country in the world.

The pandemic underlines the importance of a systemic, transboundary, cross-sector and cooperative response to environmental crises at a time when countries are moving in the opposite direction towards more isolationist, self-serving policies. It also illustrates the benefits of early action, of flattening the curve, and of initial prevention rather than costly retrospective attempts to find a cure. The way people responded is also relevant for climate change; Covid-19 demonstrated that when a threat is clear and accepted, people are willing to make extraordinary and immediate changes to the way they live. Like the pandemic, other environmental threats such as climate change and biodiversity loss develop in non-linear ways, are exacerbated by various risk multipliers, hit the poorest hardest and can only be adequately addressed through the kind of long-term thinking that is anathema to decision-makers who are hidebound by short-term political considerations.

There are significant differences, however. The severity of Covid-19 pales into insignificance compared with the projected impacts of other environmental threats. The 2020 Global Risks Report classed all five environmental risks (climate change, biodiversity loss, extreme weather, natural disasters and human-caused natural disasters) as greater than the threat from infectious diseases in terms of impact and likelihood. Current national commitments made in response to the Paris Agreement place us on course for a 3-4 degree temperature rise, well above the levels (1.5-2 degrees) deemed to pose the maximum acceptable level of risk. The impacts of 3-4 degrees on food production are projected to be massive, with simultaneous harvest failure and water shortages that will be much more

devastating than the pandemic. Furthermore, the impacts of climate change are projected to come much more slowly (and less visibly) initially, but with a series of sudden shocks as different tipping points are breached and feedback loops initiated. Requirements of behaviour change may also be more extreme, and more permanent, than those experienced during the pandemic, and people may be less inclined to accept them, having

already experienced the pain of an economic shutdown feels like.

Covid-19 has highlighted what happens when you fail to listen to experts, when political and business decision-making is restricted to short-term horizons and when governments neglect their duty to provide societal safety nets, fail to invest in public assets and rely too heavily on markets as solutions.

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## COVID-19 AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BUILDING BACK BETTER

*“The coronavirus may turn out to be the locomotive of history which accelerates the transition to a better, fairer society. But we will have to fight to ensure it happens”*

Caroline Lucas, MP

Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic clearly provides some learning points for how not to prepare for and respond to an environmental crisis, it also illustrates the limitations of driving change through facts and figures and ‘we told you so’. The response to the warnings of the pandemic, just as with the responses to warnings about climate change, was not particularly rational. When our world view is challenged, our instinctive reaction is often to cling tenaciously to our own, comfortably familiar, perception of reality. Stories are the way we understand the world, not facts, or lessons of what not to do. Directly challenging a story often reinforces it. The most effective way to change a story is to provide a better one.

The economist Milton Friedman recognised the potential of crises as a junction for change, but also emphasised the need to have new stories ready for when audiences are ready to hear them. Unfortunately, his way of thinking has arguably been one of the driving forces behind many of the environmental (as well as social and political) issues we face to today. In a world that has largely become a market-

driven society, environmental destruction is incorrectly perceived as an economically rational decision, and environmental conservation as an economically irrational cost. As long as this remains the case, environmentalists may protect the occasional species or save the odd habitat, but the global measures of environmental performance will continue to head rapidly in the wrong direction. Can we use this Covid-induced crisis to popularise alternative stories, stories where natural, human and social capital are valued above man-made capital, where progress is defined not solely by GDP, economic growth or financial profit, but by people’s actual well-being?

Protecting the environment requires systemic change. It requires economic change, social change and political change. To ‘build back better’ is already a mantra flowing across social and mainstream media, with many opportunities identified for how we can learn from the pandemic and use it to reform the way we live, the way we organise our economic frameworks and the way

we govern ourselves. Arguably, this is an area where environmentalists have fallen short in the past. We have failed not only to move from facts and figures to a story that resonates, but also to tell a coherent story across environmental disciplines or one that integrates the environment into the other issues people care about. The challenge now for environmentalists is to ensure that

environmental values are integrated into the various contributions to the 'build back better' story; to ensure the multiplicity of voices are aligned and mutually supportive, rather than competing for attention; and to identify – and be ready to implement – clear, tangible steps that will ensure the unfolding narrative is a persuasive one.



Women's shanket-making co-operative in Kyrgyzstan. Credit: Juan Pablo Morales/FH

## WHAT DOES BUILDING BACK BETTER IN A WAY THAT INTEGRATES THE ENVIRONMENT LOOK LIKE?

*“There can be no return to normal because normal was the problem in the first place.”*

Graffiti in Hong Kong

There is no single story for building back better. But the various narrative threads, and how they relate to the environment, include:

- Recognising the biosphere as the cornerstone of human well-being, with intrinsic relationships to human health and nutrition, and to the regulation of the planetary systems upon which almost every aspect of human life depends. Furthermore, the biosphere has a right to exist and flourish irrespective of any recognisable dependence humans have on it.
- Redefining the idea of human nature. People are innately altruistic, empathetic, caring and cooperative, rather than just the individualistic and competitive ‘economic beings’ and consumers they are assumed and conditioned to be in many parts of the world. The pandemic has restored values such as appreciation of key workers, spending time with families and communities, spending time in nature. Many people have a deep connection to their environment, over and above the immediate benefits it provides.
- Redesigning economic frameworks to focus on the promotion of human well-being and equality within clear environmental and social boundaries, rather than on GDP, economic growth and capital accumulation, which are poor substitutes for well-being. Man-made capital is ultimately dependent on the nature that underpins it. Markets can have a role in delivering human well-being, but it has to be a limited role.
- Matching political frameworks to the new economic frameworks. Governments need to be leaders. They need to focus on their fundamental responsibility to protect citizens and public assets, including health systems and the environment. The post-Covid stimulus packages represent the opportunity to put in place the new frameworks.
- Incentivising businesses to rewrite their social contract, addressing the increasing distrust in them shown by society. Demonstration of a net positive impact on society and the environments they operate in should be a prerequisite for operation. Companies that demonstrably benefit the Sustainable Development Goals through environmental, social and governance metrics should be supported and rewarded. Companies that do not should be penalised and reformed.

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*‘One of the things most dangerous is the lapse into believing that everything was fine before disaster struck, and that all we need to do is return to things as they were. Ordinary life before the pandemic was already a catastrophe of desperation and exclusion for too many human beings, an environmental and climate catastrophe, an obscenity of inequality. It is too soon to know what will emerge from this emergency, but not too soon to start looking for chances to help decide it.’*

Rebecca Solnit, author of *A Paradise Built in Hell*

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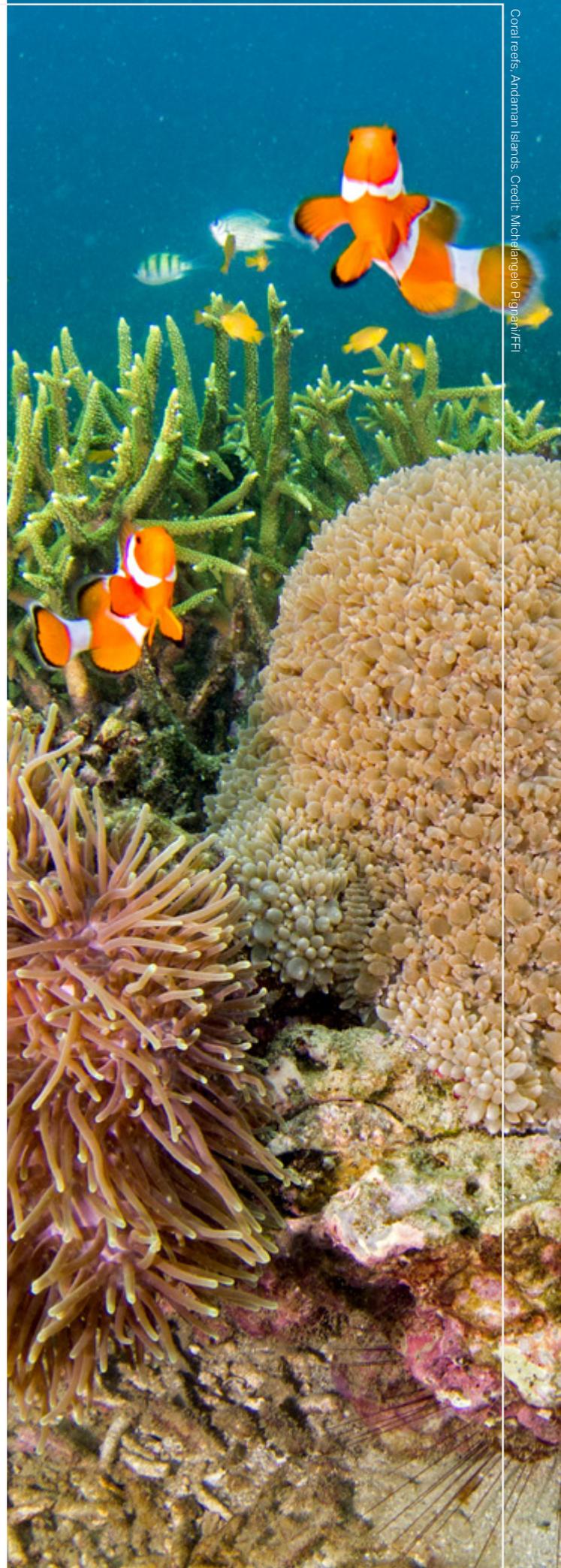
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Coral reefs, Andaman Islands. Credit: Michaelangelo Bigazzi/FI