



# Economic Recovery to Advance the Health & Well-Being of People & the Planet: Guiding Principles

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**T**he Covid-19 pandemic has inflicted extraordinary impacts across the globe on the health and well-being of billions of people. Economic impacts of the pandemic are extensive, complex and evolving: the economic contractions in the US and the European Union are of historic proportions; China is seeing its first economic contraction since the 1970s; economies in Latin America, Africa, and Asia-Pacific, with most countries facing recessions. The International Labour Organization reports that almost 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy, mostly in developing countries, are significantly impacted by the pandemic, leading to a 60% decline in their earnings. Responding to these impacts, national governments, individual agencies and multi-country public entities had launched nearly 1,600 funding initiatives totaling nearly \$16 trillion by early May. To date, these funding initiatives have overwhelmingly focused on pandemic health-care spending, immediate unemployment relief, and other direct economic support measures. However, the U.S., the European Union, European nations, other wealthy nations, and multilateral institutions are considering longer-term economic recovery investments.

The pandemic and these recovery responses play out within an even broader and deeper global malaise in which climate change has reached crisis proportions with vast and varied impacts already evident and potentially catastrophic impacts for some communities anticipated. Nature itself is at risk, with alarming levels of deforestation, accelerating biodiversity losses, chronic droughts and extreme flooding, a warming ocean, and more. Yet research of the Conservancy and others presents hopeful possibilities for addressing climate change, restoring ecosystems, and improving water quality while also meeting the health, food security, well-being and livelihood needs of an increasing global population. Those possibilities depend upon conservation, ecosystem restoration, and changes in land and water management practices, as well as food production systems, along with profound changes in energy and transportation systems, infrastructure and urban planning and design, and other pathways to a low-carbon economy.

Initial response measures are focused on supporting public health systems, as well as job protection and social welfare. Over time, governments are shifting to recovery efforts to help their economies bounce back from the historic impacts of the public health response measures, create jobs, enhance food security, and better secure

the health of people and the planet. The Nature Conservancy presents these principles to guide those second-phase economic recovery efforts and advance a Healthy Future for People and the Planet.

- 1. ENSURE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND EQUITY:** The global health crisis and the global economic crisis lay bare numerous underlying inequities. In both rich and poor countries, there are disproportionate impacts on the poor, on racial minorities, on Indigenous Peoples, and on women and girls, in various contexts. Recovery measures need to ensure a fundamental respect for human rights and address both the immediate needs to secure the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable communities and individuals, as well as address the underlying causes of inequality and advance social justice. Our goal should be to ensure a more just, equitable and sustainable world, as envisioned in the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 2. RECOVER TOWARDS A CARBON-NEUTRAL, NATURE-POSITIVE ECONOMY:** The world faces an acute public health crisis, underpinned by chronic climate change and nature crises. The world is at a global pivot point, with an opportunity, through response measures to the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis, to reshape the world economy towards a more sustainable path. The Nature Conservancy calls for a global recovery effort that puts the world on an economic pathway that is carbon-neutral and nature-positive, with the intent of creating a world that is more equitable, prosperous, healthier, and more resilient. A fairly robust economic literature and set of metrics exist to help guide economic recovery efforts toward carbon-neutrality. These have been articulated clearly in New Nature Economy reports, the six principles for recovery put forward by the UN Secretary General and the European Commission Green Deal and Taxonomy Initiative. In addition, TNC calls for also ensuring that recovery efforts safeguard nature and the essential services it provides, enhance conservation, and invest in the restorative powers of ecosystems. This principle includes:
  - Investing in a low-carbon future
  - Reducing and compensating for infrastructure impacts on nature
  - Investing in green infrastructure and natural climate solutions
  - Investing in ecosystem protection, conservation and restoration
- 3. DO NO HARM:** Economic stimulus efforts should do no harm. Existing environmental laws and regulations should be maintained throughout the recovery process. Policymakers and interests representing polluting industries may be tempted to waive or eliminate bedrock environmental protections based on the claim that they are an impediment to economic growth. Recovery efforts must be clean and green. In addition, as countries face increased government debt loads, depressed economies, foreign currency shortfalls and disrupted supply chains for value-added products, there will be pressure to liquidate natural capital resources for quick cash. In this context, environmental safeguards should be maintained and natural capital sustained.
- 4. ACCELERATE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY:** The agriculture sector accounts for about a quarter of global employment and exceeds that in many developing countries. Unsustainable agricultural, fisheries, and forestry practices are leading drivers of biodiversity loss and greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, improving the sustainability of food production on land and sea through intensification, regenerative practices, eliminating deforestation in supply chains, and advancing sustainable management of farms, fisheries, and forests can improve biodiversity, reduce climate change, improve soil health, and increase the resilience of these sectors to climate change and other shocks and stressors. Such practices can also contribute to reducing risks of zoonotic disease outbreaks and at far lower costs than responding to the effects of pandemics. Stimulus measures should support rural economies and livelihoods – in part by reducing and redirecting harmful subsidies - while facilitating the transition to food production that works in partnership with nature.