

8 societal lessons emerging from the COVID-19 crisis



Author: Igone Guerra

SEO Keywords: COVID-19 societal lessons

SEO Snippet: 8 topics emerging from the COVID-19 crisis offer some important societal lessons about the future of the world as we know it

The explosive spread of COVID-19 has caught the world by surprise, and it couldn't have exposed more clearly just how closely connected we are. The whole world has been united by a single word, COVID-19. Despite its negative consequences, the pandemic has offered some important lessons from which we can derive new and emerging knowledge. This article takes a detailed look at eight of them.

In December 2019, a new coronavirus was discovered in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Since then, the virus has spread rapidly all over the world and become the most serious global crisis since the Second World War. On 30th January 2020, The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic and stated that the current situation was 'a public health emergency of international concern' (WHO, 2020).

Governments worldwide are struggling to cope with COVID-19. Every day, the pandemic is revealing new challenges and vulnerabilities at the social, economic and political levels. In this situation, uncertainty has become the new normal. Few governments are fully prepared to deal with the health crisis. Therefore, now more than ever, it is essential for countries to work together and learn from each other.

In this context, the role of social innovation is essential to help overcome this crisis. Both new approaches and solutions are crucial in combatting COVID-19. Although a great challenge remains in terms of conducting further research into the causes, consequences and effects of the crisis, we can outline eight emerging topics that provide us with some quick learning.

1. The importance of investing in the Public Good.

The coronavirus crisis has brought to mind the unresolved financial crisis of 2008. That last crisis, and the austerity policies needed to overcome it, resulted in major cuts to public health systems, with serious consequences for the most vulnerable sectors of the population and society as a whole.

As stated by Marianna Mazucatto in a recent article¹ published in The Guardian, we now have an opportunity to learn from this crisis and rethink the mission of governments in our societies. Thus, public administrations should:

- Invest in institutions to prevent these crises. No doubt, there will be other similar crises, and it is clear that they may be very difficult to predict, but we could be better equipped to fight them whenever they do appear.
- Focus on steering innovation to solve public challenges.
- Strengthen the stakeholder approach to working together to solve public challenges.
- Learn from the past and develop a real social and economic transformation.

These measures, combined with building government capacity to protect public goods such as education or health, will strengthen democratic systems. Conversely, not reacting in time and not taking measures to protect them may harm democracy.

2. Social protection policies to alleviate the impact of COVID-19.

Representatives of the UN system agencies have called for urgent social protection measures to respond to COVID-19. According to the Social Protection Interagency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), 'social protection can play a key role in cushioning the socio-economic impact of COVID-19'². This international body requests governments to protect and support people throughout the crisis in its health, economic and social dimensions. Specifically, SPIAC-B focuses attention on six urgent measures (see the figure below).

¹ The COVID-19 crisis is a chance to do Capitalism differently. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/18/the-COVID-19-crisis-is-a-chance-to-do-capitalism-differently>. The Guardian, Opinion Coronavirus Outbreak, 18 March, 2020.

² [A Joint Statement on the Role of Social Protection in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). SPIAC-B, 2020.

1. Ensure access to health services and support people in adopting necessary prevention measures
2. Ensure income security and access to essential goods and services and protect human capabilities and livelihoods
3. Prioritize the most vulnerable
4. Mobilize substantial domestic and international financing to protect and enhance fiscal space for health and social protection in all countries
5. Ensure continued/scaled up and coordinated delivery capacities of social protection and humanitarian crisis response programmes
6. Design crisis response measures also with a view to strengthening social protection systems in the medium- and long term

Source: SPIAC-B, 2020

3. Now more than ever, Collaborative Governance is a must.

The extraordinary shock(s) to our system that the coronavirus pandemic is bringing invites us to rethink our systems of governing. In this context, governance gains momentum as a new way of functioning that implies distributing roles, defining practices and taking decisions in a collective form.

In a recent webinar, Professor Duncan Green introduced us to the topic of COVID-19 as a critical juncture. According to him, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the strengths and weaknesses of our systems in 'detecting, preparing and leading the crisis and will do it with the recovery', thus revealing how vulnerable our societies actually are.

Collective action and foresight, a transparent and effective government and an accurately informed citizenry are more needed than ever. The government, organisation or institution of a single country cannot fight this virus alone. It is a global crisis that demands global action. In these dramatic times, the collaboration of multiple agencies, levels and sectors is mandatory. This crisis represents an opportunity to transform current systems and build new models of governance, politics and values based on cooperation and collaboration.

4. COVID-19. An opportunity to recover trust.

People need to trust science, public authorities and the media. Over the past few years, trust in these institutions has been undermined. As a consequence of this, today, trust is being called into question all over the world. In turbulent times, it is even more important that we have trust. For public administration, maintaining the public's confidence in government is a matter of existence.

Transparency, open data or collaborative approaches are outstanding pillars with which to recover trust in institutions. Now more than ever, citizens need to understand governments' decisions.

Governments have a great opportunity to rebuild citizens' trust in institutions through the responsible and ethical use of data and sources of information. They are urged to process the multitude of data and keep society updated on the latest information about COVID-19, while being very rigorous with the measures taken to control the situation. The red line between health protection and the right to privacy is emerging as a hot topic in this crisis. Governments need to be open about how data is collected and used, how it is shared, with whom and for what purpose.

Thus, this crisis should be an opportunity to build new alliances and earn trust for the future.

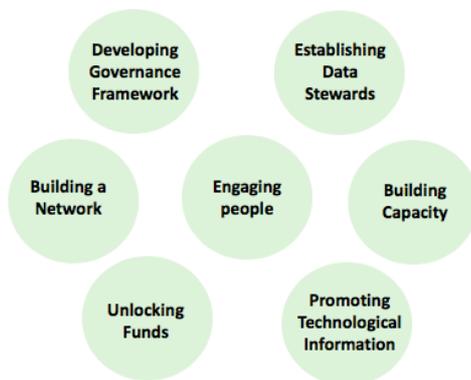
5. Data management in light of COVID-19.

Understanding COVID-19 is a global challenge. Many countries around the world are working on collecting as much data as possible, aimed at finding solutions to combat the virus. If data is always a key ingredient in decision-making, then it is needed even more now.

In a crisis such as the one in which we are immersed, the amount of data collected on a daily basis turns its processing, storage, management and understanding into a titanic adventure. As a result, we have entered a global state of profound uncertainty and anxiety (The GovLab, 2020).

In this context, data collaboratives gain momentum as a new form of collaboration for exchanging data to create public value. The [GovLab](#) offers a set of seven steps to make data collaboration systematic, sustainable and responsible in light of COVID-19.

7 ACTIONS TO MAKE DATA COLLABORATION, SYSTEMATIC, SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE IN LIGHT OF COVID-19



Source. GovLab, 2020

6. The importance of enhancing digitalisation.

COVID-19 is impacting countries right around the world, and digital solutions are emerging to mitigate the crisis. Many governments are taking seriously the shift from

an analogue society to a digital one. The COVID-19 crisis has uncovered the need to further enhance digital infrastructure in the political, economic, social and cultural fields.

The beneficial effects of technological advances are being revealed by this crisis. Digital solutions in consuming, transporting, connecting, collaborating and organising are rapidly emerging and will prove to be irreversible.

We have still many challenges to face, including the so-called 'digital divide', but we should take advantage of this kind of situation to place technology at the service of humanity and make good use of it.

7. Combatting fake news.

COVID-19 is on the covers of newspapers, magazines and media all over the world. As fast as information spreads, so too does fake news, resulting in a serious danger to the public.

We are aware that to help limit the spread of COVID-19, we should all be following recommendations such as maintaining social distancing and regularly washing our hands. Similarly, we should also be taking various '*hygienic measures*' in terms of information.

Combatting disinformation and misinformation, the two faces of false information, is crucial in the fight against COVID-19. Treating the information we read with caution and checking its source, especially when sharing information online, is part of our civic responsibilities. This virus is uncertain, uncontrolled and unknown, which provides fertile ground for fake news to spread.

8. Involving the community in the fight against COVID-19.

More than [750,000 people in the UK](#) signed up to a recent call for health volunteers. Similar cases can be found in countries all over the world, which supports the idea that people everywhere are strongly committed to helping in the fight against COVID-19. People are willing to give their support and be part of the solution with courage and creativity. We now have a great opportunity to strengthen both citizens' relationship with their communities and intergenerational solidarity.

In the same vein, many social innovation initiatives are emerging from individuals or communities offering creative solutions to cope with the different sides of this virus. At Social Innovation Academy we are collating successful community-led social innovation initiatives that are being implemented worldwide and in different fields. To find out more about them, consult: [8 Social Innovations in times of COVID-19](#).

In conclusion, COVID-19 is stressing our system to the extreme, but at the same time, it is making it possible to implement a number of social and institutional reforms. These eight emerging topics show us different issues to consider for future similar

scenarios. From the impetus given to public goods and the investment in R&D, to the empowerment of people and communities, the pandemic offers us a chance to profoundly review our ways of government and specifically to enhance democratic governance.

Learn more at Social Innovation Academy

Check out the [Social Innovation Academy](#) – the first fully online management training programme focusing exclusively on social innovation. [Subscribe to our newsletter](#), join our [private LinkedIn group](#), become one of [our friends](#) or follow us on social media ([LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)). We welcome all requests for collaboration [here](#).
