

**SSRP**  
SUSSEX SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH PROGRAMME



# *Crisis as Opportunity?*

## Using the Global Pandemic to Catalyse a Just and Sustainable Recovery

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Senior Fellow, Rural Futures Cluster, Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

GlobalGoals2020 Symposium – University of Utrecht, 9-11 June 2020



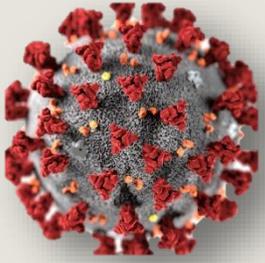
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# *Crisis as Opportunity?*

## Using the Global Pandemic to Catalyse a Just and Sustainable Transformation

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# Sustainability in the Time of Covid

*“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”*

– Charles Dickens



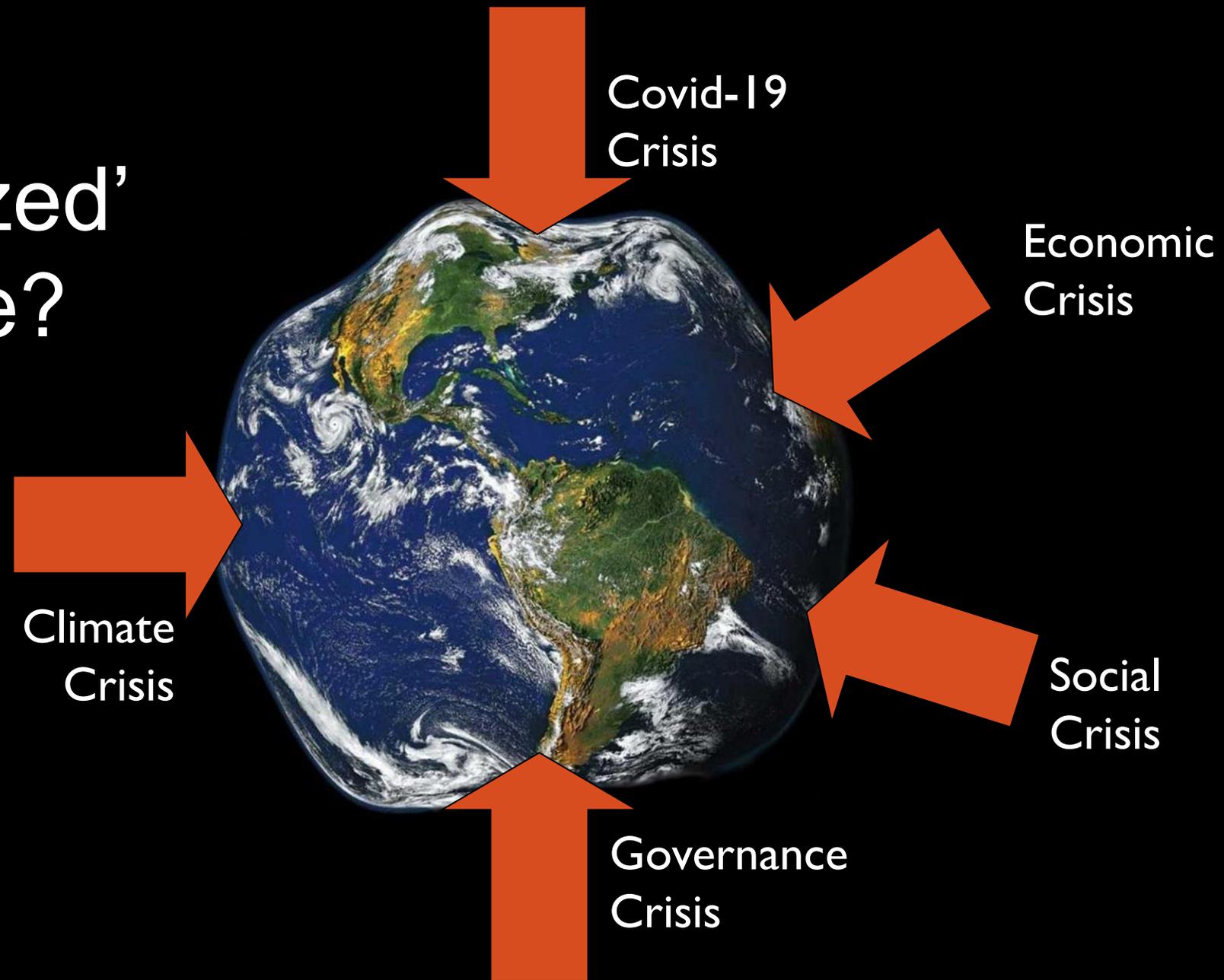
# Sustainability in the Time of Covid

- Never in modern history has one event – the **Covid-19 pandemic** – had such a wide-ranging effect on the world
- Some analysts have argued that the pandemic has accelerated the **shift from the ‘Great Integration’ to the ‘Great Fragmentation’**
- Others are saying that **after the ‘Great Lockdown’ could (or should) come the ‘Great Transformation’**

# From Crisis to Transformation

- *How can we avoid the ‘Great Fragmentation’?*
- *What would that ‘Great Transformation’ look like – and how can we help bring it about?*
- *And what role can the Sustainable Development Goals play in this transformation?*

Our  
'squeezed'  
future?



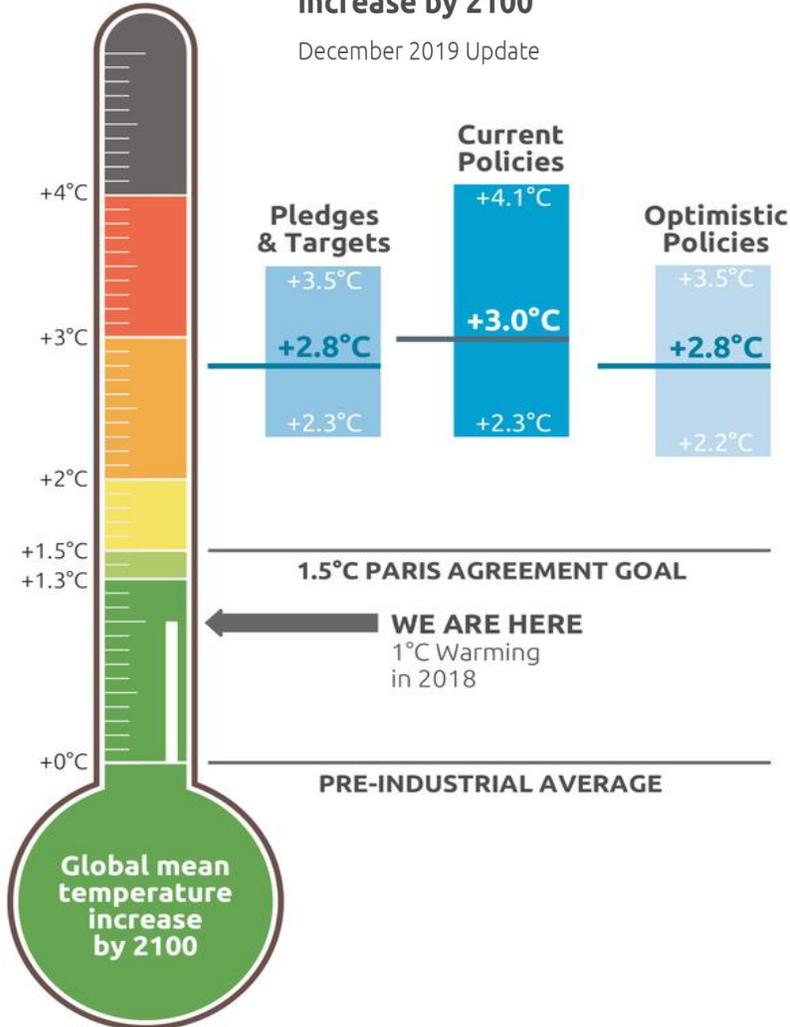
-- Multiple, intersecting crises --

# The Climate Crisis



CAT warming projections  
Global temperature increase by 2100

December 2019 Update



## CLIMATE ACTION TRACKER RATING CATEGORIES

CRITICALLY INSUFFICIENT	HIGHLY INSUFFICIENT	INSUFFICIENT	2°C COMPATIBLE	1.5°C PARIS AGREEMENT COMPATIBLE	ROLE MODEL
4°C+ WORLD	< 4°C WORLD	< 3°C WORLD	< 2°C WORLD	< 1.5°C WORLD	<< 1.5°C WORLD
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	ARGENTINA	AUSTRALIA	BHUTAN	MOROCCO	0 Countries
SAUDI ARABIA	CHILE	BRAZIL	COSTA RICA	THE GAMBIA	2 Countries
TURKEY	CHINA	CANADA	ETHIOPIA		
USA	GERMANY	EU	INDIA		
UKRAINE	INDONESIA	KAZAKHSTAN	KENYA		
VIET NAM	JAPAN	MEXICO	PHILIPPINES		
6 Countries	SINGAPORE	NEW ZEALAND	6 Countries		
	SOUTH AFRICA	NORWAY			
	SOUTH KOREA	PERU			
	UAE	SWITZERLAND			
	10 Countries	UNITED KINGDOM			
		11 Countries			



CAT country ratings of Pledges & Targets

December 2019 update

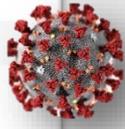
*Implementation of the Paris Agreement was not on track before Covid-19 struck – and could be slowed further*



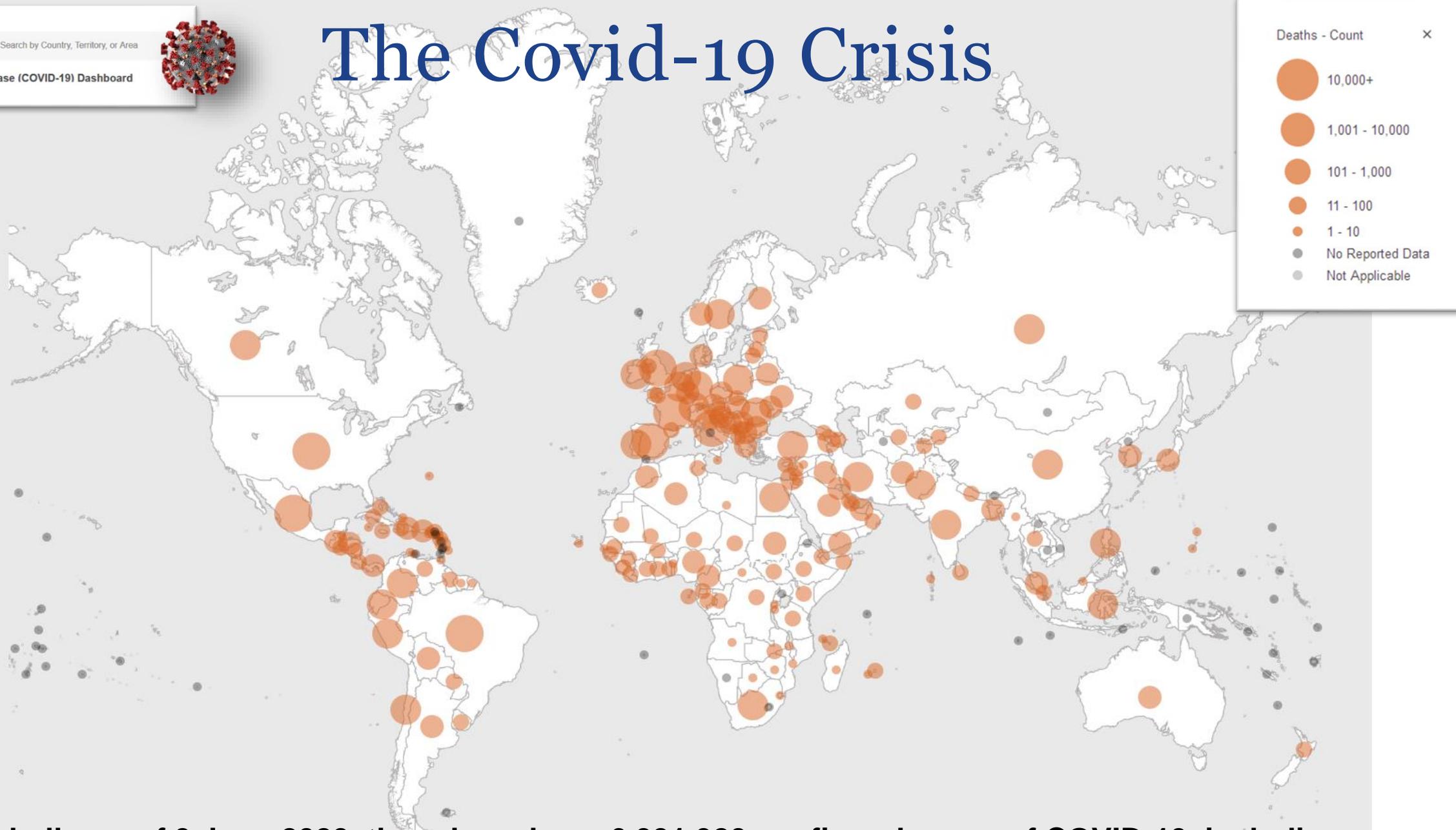
World Health Organization

Search by Country, Territory, or Area

WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard



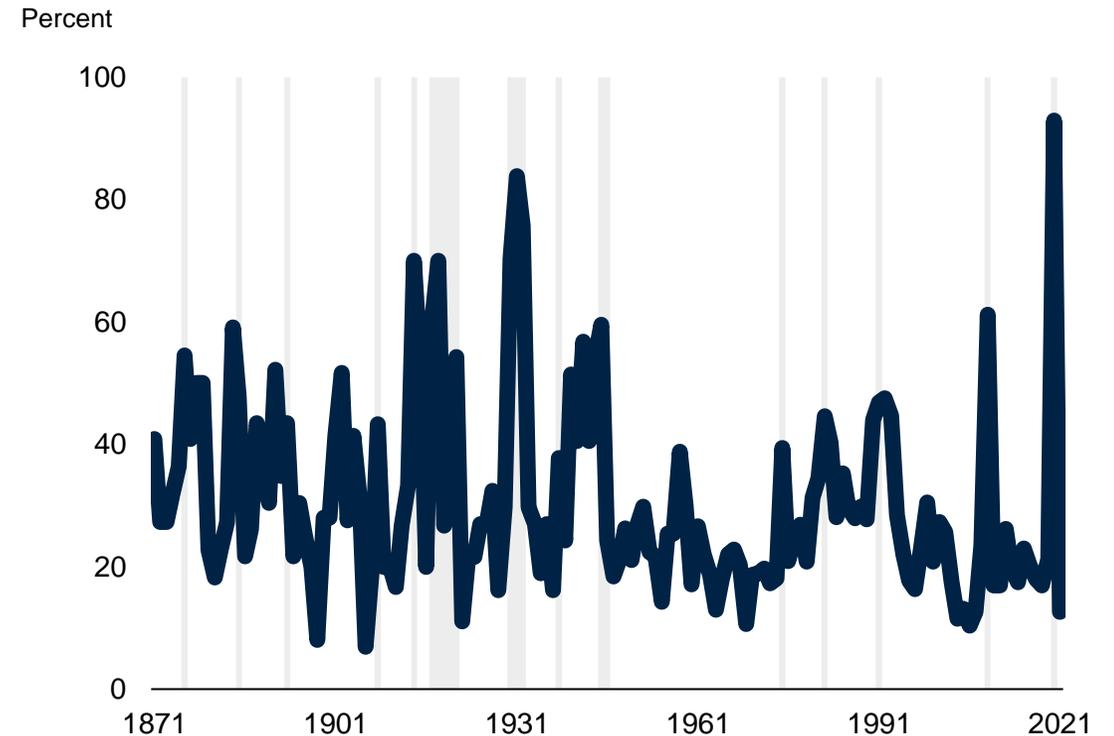
# The Covid-19 Crisis



**Globally, as of 9 June 2020, there have been 6,991,920 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 403,128 deaths, reported to WHO**

# The Economic Crisis

- **Covid-19 pandemic has triggered the most widespread global economic meltdown since at least 1870** and risks fuelling a dramatic rise in poverty levels around the globe
- **Global GDP is expected to shrink by 5.2% this year**, in an economic decline more than *twice as deep* as the recession triggered by the 2008 financial crisis



**Share of economies in recession, defined as an annual contraction in per capita GDP**

Source: World Bank Global Economic Prospects (June 2020)

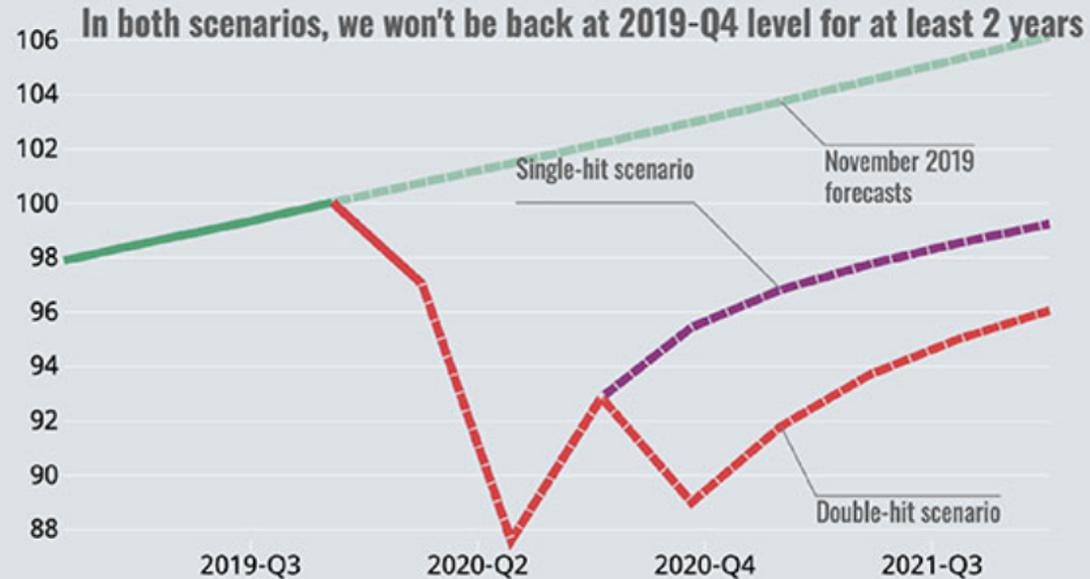
# The Economic Crisis

## Double-hit scenario: A second wave of infections hits before year-end

- A renewed outbreak of infections triggers a return to lock-downs.
- World economic output plummets 7.6% this year, before climbing back 2.8% in 2021.
- The OECD unemployment rate nearly doubles to 10% with little recovery in jobs by 2021.

## A collapse in output followed by a slow recovery

World GDP, index 2019-Q4=100



Source: OECD (2020), "OECD Economic Outlook No. 107 (Edition 2020/1)", OECD Economic Outlook: Statistics and Projections (database).

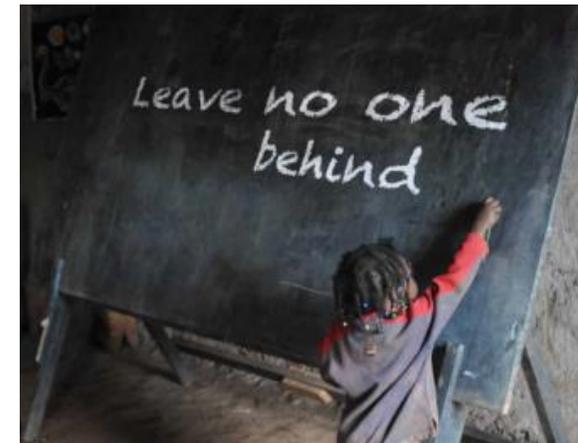
## Single-hit scenario: A second wave is avoided

- Global economic activity falls 6% in 2020 and OECD unemployment climbs to 9.2% from 5.4% in 2019.
- Living standards fall less sharply than with a second wave but five years of income growth is lost across the economy by 2021.

Source: OECD Economic Outlook (June 2020)

# The Social Crisis

- ***The Covid lockdown has exacerbated intersecting inequalities, which drive poverty and marginalisation***
- **The most vulnerable are those already most at risk**
- **Some 50 million people risk falling into extreme poverty** this year owing to the pandemic
- **Women are among the hardest hit** – making up 70% of health workers globally and providing 75% of unpaid care work
- And we have already seen how the **Covid crisis has affected racial inequalities** around the world

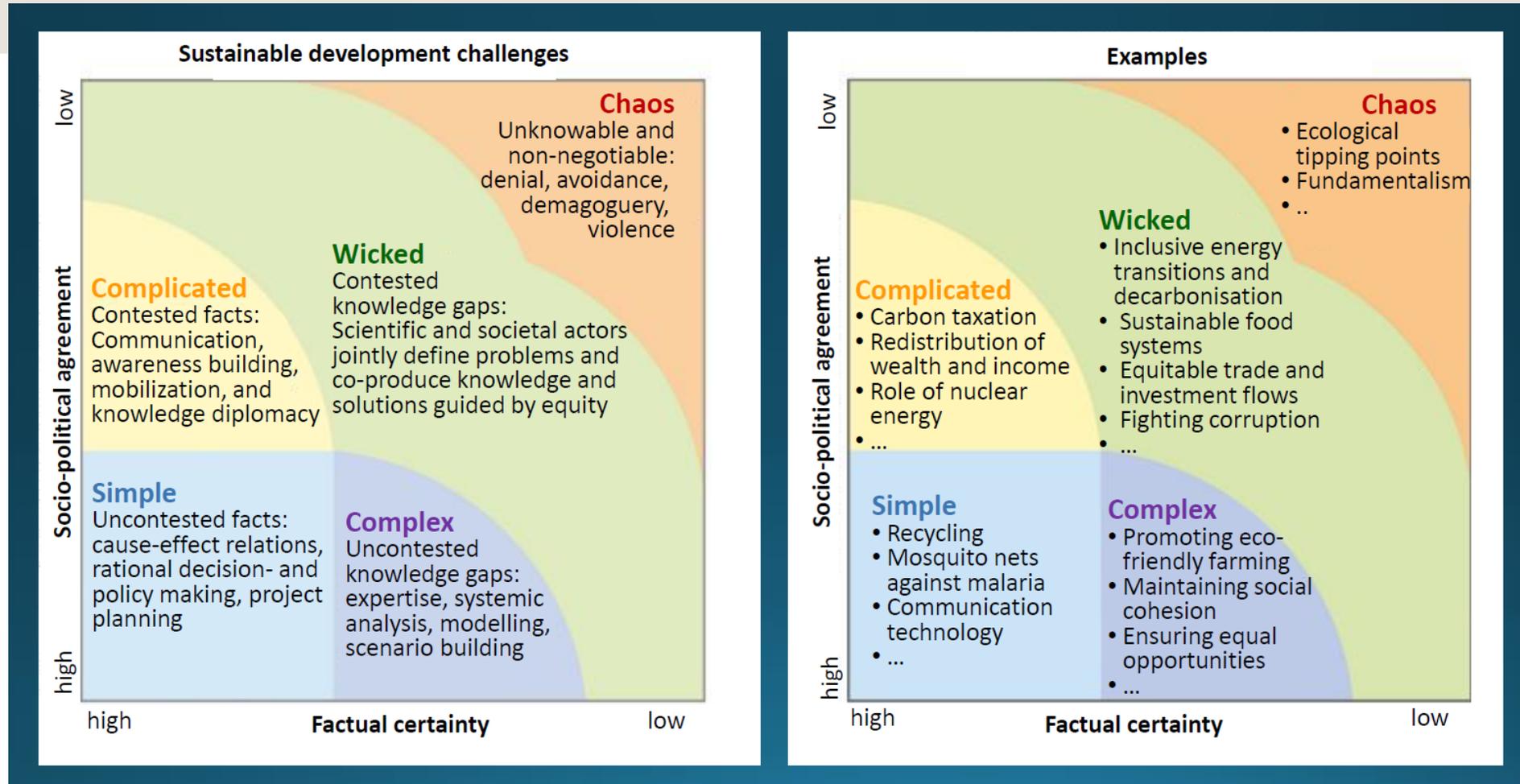


# Crises as Wicked Problems

## Common characteristics of '*wicked problems*'

- ✓ Difficult to define clearly
- ✓ Many interdependencies, multi-causal
- ✓ Unforeseen consequences – huge uncertainties
- ✓ Often not stable
- ✓ No clear solution
- ✓ Socially complex
- ✓ Not the responsibility of any single organisation
- ✓ Involve changing behaviour

# The Role of Science in Knowledge-Based Transformations to Sustainable Development



Source: Global Sustainable Development Report (2019)

# Shaping Our Future

*Today's policy responses to these multiple, overlapping crises and 'wicked problems' will shape our collective economic, ecological and social prospects for the coming decade – and beyond*

- The Chinese word for **'crisis'** means **'danger at a point of juncture'** (traditional Chinese: 危機; simplified Chinese: 危机; pinyin: wēijī)
- But it is frequently invoked in the West as being comprised of two Chinese characters signifying **'danger' + 'opportunity'**
- *Despite this misinterpretation, the phrase **'crisis as opportunity'** does have value and is being used widely to discuss the 'where next?' in the post-pandemic era*

# Crisis as Opportunity

- A common phrase attributed to political leaders from Winston Churchill to John F. Kennedy is:

***‘Never waste a good crisis’***

- Several politicians have used the expression to focus attention on the Climate Crisis → promoting various versions of the ***‘Green New Deal’***
- Various leaders have evoked the phrase during the Covid Crisis to call for a ***redoubling of efforts to implement the SDGs***

# Covid and Our Common Humanity

*“Covid-19 shines a light on our common humanity and shared vulnerabilities, and it is only through a collective, collaborative response that all our fundamental interests can be served.”*

– The Elders



# ‘Opening Up’ Sustainability

- We need to ask, ‘***What exactly is to be sustained – and transformed? For whom – and by whom?***’
- This means **linking sustainability to specific qualities of equity, social justice and environmental integrity**
- Sustainability goals are therefore **context-specific and inevitably contested**
- **This makes public deliberation and negotiation about those goals essential**



# Structural and Enabling Change

- **The multiple crises sparked by Covid-19 offer us a chance to reflect collectively on what kind of future we want**
- We know that **recovery will require massive transformations** in economies, societies and politics → *'business as usual' is not an option*
- If such transformations are to not only be *'sustainable'*, but also *'socially just'* and even *'emancipatory'*, then **approaches are needed that are at once structural and enabling**
- **This will require driving change from below and above**

# Unruly Politics: Sparking Change from Below

- Recent demonstrations about climate and racial (and other) injustice have challenged authority and opened up new spaces for dialogue and debate
- History shows that in an effort to stem the contagion of *'unruly politics'* from spreading, incumbent powers are often willing to make real concessions
- **Social renewal and democratic progress depend vitally on episodes of extra-institutional disorder as much as the formal institutions of politics**



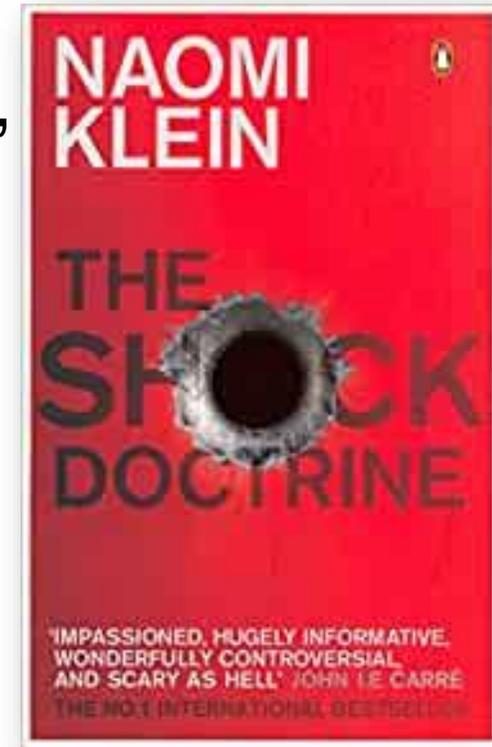
# Rethinking the State: Facilitating Change from Above

- **Since the 1980s, most governments have followed a neoliberal agenda**, letting business 'steer' and create wealth, intervening only to fix market failures
- **Covid has shown that we now need to rethink the role of the state in driving change**
- **We need to reassert the central role of an effective, capable and enabling public sector** in responding to society's needs, building resilience and dealing with crises as they arise



# A Warning: When Incumbent Power Profits from Crisis

- Naomi Klein used the term **‘*shock doctrine*’** to describe the brutal tactic of using the public’s disorientation following a collective crisis – wars, coups, terrorist attacks, market crashes, natural disasters – to push through radical measures
- This **‘*shock therapy*’** follows a clear pattern:
  - ✓ Wait for a crisis
  - ✓ Declare a state of emergency requiring urgent action
  - ✓ Suspend some or all democratic norms
  - ✓ Ram through a list of policy changes quickly



# Rethinking Global Governance

- The world has faced extreme conditions before
- Leaders of the 1940s reflected on their failure to cooperate after WWI, how it drove the world into economic catastrophe (the Great Depression) and conflict (WWII) *and resolved to do better*
- They knew that international cooperation would be essential to rebuild afterwards and to redevelop the global economy and recast global institutions.
- *So, too, today's leaders must begin to plan post-pandemic cooperation*



# What We Need Now...

- **Understanding of:**

- complexity, uncertainty and dynamics in socio-ecological and political systems
- how pathways to sustainability are defined, by multiple players in different places
- the politics of choice around directions of sustainable development pathways, and the distributional consequences of those choices

- **Responses that:**

- transcend the local and the global
- support plural knowledges and values
- involve cross-disciplinary methods and analysis
- open up and broaden out inputs to debates and outputs to policy
- partnerships that link people across sectors, locations, and policy spaces



*Critical,  
engaged  
research to  
shape these*

# UN Decade of Action and Delivery: Can It Be a Catalyst for Transformation?

- In September 2020, the world enters what is being called the ***‘UN Decade of Action and Delivery’***, marking the need for increased effort and ambition to implement the SDGs with only ***‘ten years to transform the world’***



- The timing couldn't be any worse – *or perhaps better?*

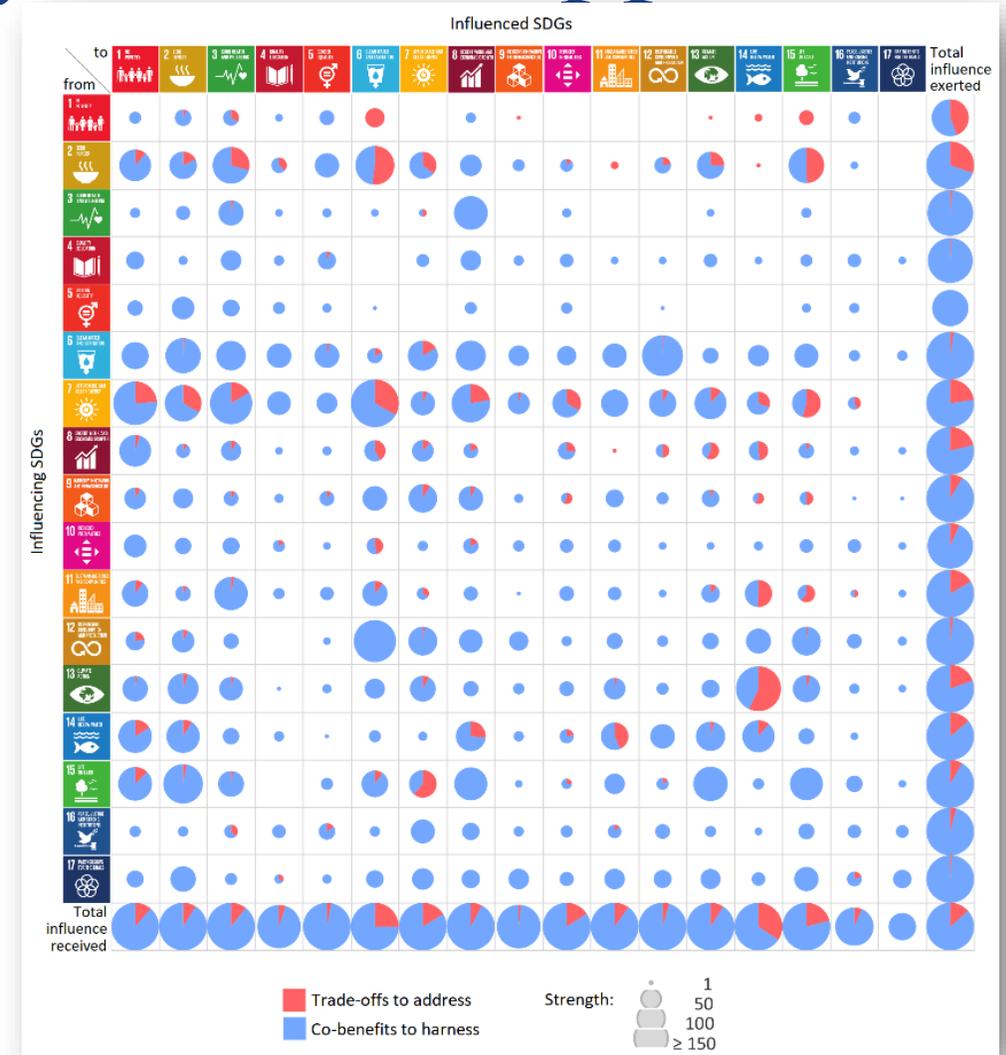
# UN Decade of Action and Delivery: A Call for a Multi-Level Response

- 1. *Global action*** – to secure greater leadership, more resources and ‘smarter solutions’ for the SDGs
- 2. *Local action*** – to embed the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities
- 3. *People action*** – to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations

# Seeking Synergies

## From Boxes to Arrows – A Systematic Approach

- Resources and capacities will be limited for the achieving the Decade of Action agenda
- We will need to move beyond a focus on individual SDGs and prioritise:
  - ✓ Finding synergies that produce co-benefits
  - ✓ Addressing trade-offs
  - ✓ Creating multiplier effects
- *We are developing methods, approaches and frameworks to do this, but more work is needed!*



# UN Decade of Action and Delivery: Can It Be a Catalyst for Transformation?

***“This crisis has already demonstrated that massive change can be brought about if there is political will and unity of purpose. The SDGs are no longer an aspirational set of goals for some distant future. They are the minimum we need to secure a safer, more just and more sustainable world for all. If leaders from across society attach the same level of importance and urgency to the fight against poverty, hunger, and climate change, we will find success in this Decade of Action on the SDGs.”***

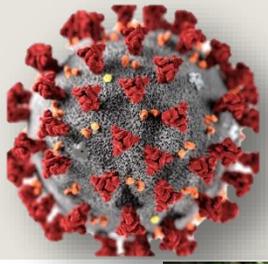
– Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General



# The SDGs – Their Time Has Come



- ***To paraphrase Dickens: “It is the worst of times, it is the best of times.”***
- **The neoliberal, command-and-control agenda of the past 40 years has failed our people and our planet and led us to the place we are today – *a world of interlocking crises***
- **We need a common set of goals and principles to guide us through the post-pandemic period and towards a more just and sustainable future**
- **The SDGs are ideally placed to serve this role – *there are no others* – and help foster a sustainable and emancipatory transformation for all**



# Thank You

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