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Building Back Better: The Importance of Gender Inclusion



Source: [UN Women \(2020\)](#) via Flickr under Creative Commons license.

On 11th March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic, emphasising the need for countries to take not just a whole-of-government, but a whole-of-society approach as well. Two years on, there have been over 450 million cases of COVID-19, including more than 6 million deaths. However, it has become increasingly obvious that not all responses to this pandemic have considered the ways in which different groups of people – particularly those with pre-existing vulnerabilities – were being affected, leaving some social protection mechanisms limited in their impact.

Gender inequality, in particular, is a significant factor when looking at the impact of COVID-19. After all, as has been seen time and time again, during crisis or emergency situations – where there is a strain on resources and weak institutional capacity –

women and girls tend to be disproportionately affected. In this case, not only have women been directly affected by the pandemic in terms of their health, they also face indirect impacts such as an increase in gender-based violence, an increase in unpaid work or the care-burden, and a decrease in paid work, with hard-won gains for women's rights and agency also increasingly under threat. After all, women were not only less likely than men to be covered by social protection systems before the pandemic, they were also more likely to be left out of COVID-19 government social protection measures.

Keeping in mind the lessons learnt from previous crises such as the Ebola epidemic and last two years of dealing with COVID-19, there needs to be a very clear understanding of what is key to build back better – an effective, gender-sensitive response to the pandemic. In particular, there needs to be

a clear and active move towards increasing numbers of women at all levels of decision-making – from policymakers in governments to international institutions and local organisations. For example, although [women make up around 70 per cent of healthcare workers](#), less than 20 percent of national health ministers are women. This highlights the significant under-representation of women where the decision-making process of public health policies is concerned, especially worrying in a public health crisis such as COVID-19.

This lack of representation of women in the decision-making arenas is also likely to affect the effectiveness of relief and recovery efforts post-crisis. For example, according to a [report by UN Women](#) on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, the COVID-19 social protection measures of most countries have been largely blind to the rights and needs of women. On the other hand, in countries with gender-specific policy measures, women were 1.6 times more likely to report receiving government aid than

women in countries without such policies – further highlighting the importance of a gender sensitive approach in the creation of national policies. Biased or discriminatory policies waste valuable resources during a global pandemic. By bringing in the specific concerns, experiences and needs of women early on in important conversations and making them an integral part of crafting policy and developing programmes, the effectiveness of such measures increases.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been pushing gender parity as a key issue. The acknowledgement of the disproportionate impacts of emergency and crisis situations on women and the need for gender-sensitive strategies and measures based on their needs and priorities is reflected in recent instruments such as the ASEAN Regional Framework on Protection, Gender and Inclusion in Disaster Management and the [ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework](#) (ACRF). For example, there are [specific provisions in the Implementation Plan of](#)

[the ACRF](#) addressing the need to mainstreaming gender equality throughout any ASEAN recovery plans. Suggested initiatives include "enhancing gender data and evidence" on the impact of the pandemic by collecting gender-segregated data to inform policy, and using the [ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025](#) to create practical guidelines to integrate gender equality into ASEAN sectoral bodies.

By forcing us to look the gaps in our societal structures that have made this pandemic particularly challenging to those who are already vulnerable, it has provided an opportunity to build back better by creating, adapting and improving social protection strategies. Hopefully those in positions of leadership will take up this challenge. After all, with women making up half the global population, gender-sensitive policies are vital for a full recovery from this global crisis.

Suggested Readings

- Lauren Billi et al, "Women and Girls Left Behind: Glaring Gaps in Pandemic Response", *UN Women*, 2021, < <https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/glaring-gaps-response-RGA.pdf>>.
- Supriya Garikipati and Uma Kambhampati, "Leading the Fight Against the Pandemic: Does Gender 'Really' Matter?", *SSRN*, 12 January 2021, <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3617953>.
- S. Nanthini and Tamara Nair, 'COVID-19 and the Impacts on Women', *NTS Insight*, 7 December 2020 <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NTS-Insight_COVID-19-and-the-Impacts-on-Women-30July2020.pdf>.
- UN Women, "Facts and figures: Humanitarian action", 2017, <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/facts-and-figures#notes>>.
- Kate Whiting, "Why do humanitarian crises disproportionately affect women?", *World Economic Forum*, 2018, <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/12/why-do-humanitarian-crises-disproportionately-affect-women/>>.

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

10 steps you can take to lower your carbon footprint

Create less food waste, ditch your grass, save coral reefs, buy less, protect forests, trade in for an electric car, weatherise your home, learn about the link between climate change and racial equity, consider carbon offsets.

The Washington Post

22 February 2022

War abroad and politics at home push U.S. climate action aside

President Biden barely made a mention of his climate goals in the State of the Union speech despite promises to make climate an issue that drives his presidency.

Somini Sengupta and Lisa Friedman

The New York Times

2 March 2022

Six key lifestyle changes can help avert the climate crises, study finds

Eat a largely plant-based diet, with healthy portions and no waste; buy no more than three new items of clothing per year; keep electrical products for at least seven years; take no more than one short haul flight every three years and one long haul flight every eight years; get rid of personal motor vehicles if possible, otherwise keep hold of your existing vehicle for longer; make at least one life shift to nudge the system, like moving to a green energy, insulating home or changing pension supplier.

Matthew Taylor

The Guardian

7 March 2022

Corals show rising sea levels in Singapore 'very likely' due to climate change

Corals can provide a good gauge of Singapore's sea-level history over the past century, with the rising levels recorded over the 20th and 21st century very likely a result of climate change. Sea levels in Singapore had gone up by 14cm since pre-1970 levels.

Cheryl Tan

The Straits Times

7 March 2022

Climate action needs more female leaders in Asia, UN Women specialist says

Asia's women often work on the front line managing and mitigating climate change impacts. But the region still has few female leaders in positions of power, such as the heads of energy and environment ministries. Consequently, their voices are not well represented at a leadership level.

Raquel Carvalho

South China Morning Post

13 March 2022

Vietnam striving to protect water resources in river basins

The Permanent Office of the Vietnam National Mekong Committee will keep a close watch on the use of water and related resources in the upper Mekong countries, make timely reports on hot issues in the river basin, boost bilateral cooperation and data sharing with Laos and Cambodia, and press on with negotiations on a deal on regulations for water use along the Vietnam - Cambodia border.

Vietnam Plus

14 March 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

State of climate action 2021: Systems transformations required to limit global warming to 1.5°C

The transitions required to avoid the worst climate impacts are not happening fast enough. Of the 40 indicators assessed, none are on track to reach 2030 targets.

Boehm, S., et al.

Washington, DC: World Resources Institute

2021

Climate change 2022: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability

Increased heatwaves, droughts and floods are already exceeding plants' and animals' tolerance thresholds, driving mass mortalities in species such as trees and corals. These weather extremes are occurring simultaneously, causing cascading impacts that are increasingly difficult to manage. They have exposed millions of people to acute food and water insecurity, especially in Africa, Asia, Central and South America, on Small Islands and in the Arctic.

H.-O. Pörtner, et al. (eds.)

Cambridge University Press

2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Earth Day 2022

The Earth Day 2022's theme is Invest In Our Planet. We need to act (boldly), innovate (broadly), and implement (equitably). It is going to take all of us. Businesses, governments, and citizens — everyone accounted for, and everyone accountable. A partnership for the planet.

Worldwide

22 April 2022

This year's theme of the United Nations World Oceans Day is Revitalization: Collective Action for the Ocean. The ocean connects, sustains, and supports us all. Yet its health is at a tipping point and so is the well-being of all that depends on it. We need to work together to create a new balance with the ocean that no longer depletes its bounty but instead restores its vibrancy and brings it new life.

Worldwide

8 June 2022

World Oceans Day 2022

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Reviving nuclear power: Is the Philippines ready?

Philippine President Duterte has signed an executive order to include nuclear power in the country's energy mix. However, there are critical preparatory issues that need to be resolved to enhance the country's nuclear energy development.

Julius Cesar Trajano

RSIS Commentary

8 March 2022

Ukraine crisis: What's at stake for the global energy market and Singapore's energy prices?

For the average person, the reach of markets potentially impacted should be recognised. There is potential for core inflation, particularly in an important dependant country such as Singapore. Being frugal with spending is always a sensible basis for prudent financial planning.

David Broadstock

NUSNews

9 March 2022

US strikes harder at Putin, banning all Russian oil imports

The issue of oil sanctions has created a conflict for the president between political interests at home and efforts to impose costs on Russia. Though Russian oil makes up only a small part of U.S. imports, Pres Biden has said he was reluctant to ban it, cutting into supplies here and pushing gasoline prices higher.

Zeke Miller, Mike Balsamo and Josh Boak

AP

9 March 2022

The road to renewable energy in Japan, a top CO2 emitter

Japan now wants 36-38% of its power to come from renewable sources such as solar and wind by 2030, up from its previous goal of 22-24%. It is slowly getting there: in 2020, renewable energy accounted for around 20% of Japan's electricity production, up nearly two percentage points year on year.

AFP

Channel News Asia

9 March 2022

Thailand makes green push with floating hydro-solar power project

Touted by the authorities as the "world's largest floating hydro-solar farm", the Sirindhorn dam project in the northeastern province of Ubon Ratchathani is the first of 15 such farms Thailand plans to build by 2037.

AFP

Channel News Asia

10 March 2022

Commentary: The war in Ukraine is changing energy geopolitics

Russian oil will be hard for its European customers to replace. But options exist. For oil, three stand out. First, restore the Iran nuclear deal. Next, increase US oil production and exports. Finally, pressure Saudi Arabia to raise output.

Scott Montgomery

Channel News Asia

11 March 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Nuclear science and technology for climate adaptation and resilience: A reference document

This document presents all IAEA activities that are connected to climate adaptation. The document describes the global climate adaptation context; it articulates how nuclear techniques can contribute to climate adaptation and where the IAEA can add value; and it provides an analysis of the support given by the IAEA to its Member States.

IAEA

Vienna: IAEA

2021

A 10-point plan to reduce the European Union's reliance on Russian natural gas

The 10-Point Plan is consistent with the EU's climate ambitions and the European Green Deal. It points towards the outcomes achieved in the IEA Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Roadmap, in which the EU totally eliminates the need for Russian gas imports before 2030.

International Energy Agency

Paris: IEA

2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Best practices for scaling energy efficiency with energy service companies: Opportunities for ASEAN

The webinar identified the trends, challenges and some of the models that have been successful in developed and developing countries, which can inspire ASEAN member states to promote and deploy energy service companies in their countries.

Recorded Webinar

19 January 2022

3rd Government-Private Forum on the Cleaner Energy Future Initiative for ASEAN (CEFIA)

CEFIA serves as a platform to facilitate collaboration between public and private sectors in deployment of cleaner energy and low carbon technologies in the ASEAN region.

Recorded Forum

21 February 2022

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement: Trade pact with UAE seen to boost exports of agri products

The recently signed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between India and the United Arab Emirates is expected to create new opportunities for trade in agricultural products, by "strengthening infrastructure and dedicated logistics services for connecting farms to ports, where the commodities would be exported to the UAE."

Sandip Das

Financial Express

23 February 2022

Sri Lanka faces food shortages and a meager New Year

The "overnight" banning of chemical fertilizers in Sri Lanka has led to its farmers suffering from a 30% fallout in grain harvests during the Maha season. This adds to the woes of individuals amid an unfolding economic crisis in Sri Lanka, with over 500,000 people already having fallen into poverty.

Marwaan Macan-Markar

Nikkei Asia

1 March 2022

Russia-Ukraine conflict has a limited impact on China's food prices

China's growing low import-dependence for grains has made it more resilient amidst the food supply disruptions from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Prior to the invasion, China increased its off-season grain purchases. Although, these were due to concerns about the South American supply, something "separate and apart" from the situation in Ukraine.

Evelyn Cheng

CNBC

2 March 2022

PH intensifies food stability, productivity amid Russia-Ukraine conflict

The Philippine government has decided to boost local food production and to increase its rice buffer stocks, amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as the government has prioritised the "domestic economy, stability of food prices, provision for social protection and the exploration of diplomatic channels."

Genivi Verdejo

The Manila Times

7 March 2022

Rice could keep Asia's food inflation risks from getting worse

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to a reduced supplies and skyrocketing prices for wheat, experts have noted that the effects may be more muted given Asia's strong rice preference, and the potential to substitute wheat for rice in daily consumption.

Jasmine Ng

Bloomberg

8 March 2022

Indonesian food security scheme backfires for local farmers

Owing to the timing of the implementation of the Jokowi administration's crop diversification program, which coincided with the start of the farming season, some rice farmers in the North Sumatra province of Indonesia were reportedly over-stretched. This led to poorer harvests.

Hans Nicholas Jong

Eco-Business

10 March 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Agricultural policy monitoring and evaluation 2021: Addressing the challenges facing food systems

This report, published in mid-2021, documents the key agricultural policy developments that have been put in place amid the COVID-19. It noted that while majority (close to 70%) were in the form of temporary relief measures, some of the remaining ones (10%) were "no-regrets" policies focused on longer-term agri-food sector development, while others were potentially distortionary in nature.

OECD, Paris: OECD Publishing

2021

Digitalization for sustainable agri-food systems: Potential, status, and risks for the MENA Region

This article synthesizes existing evidence on the potential and current contribution of digital technologies to the agri-food sectors in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Available evidence shows that adoption of digital agriculture is at early stages, generally led by high-value agricultural production targeting domestic markets in Gulf countries and export markets.

Rachel A. Bahn, Abed Al Kareem Yehya and Rami Zurayk

Sustainability 13, 3223

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

COVID-19 & global food security: Two years later

During this webinar hosted by the International Food Policy Research Institute, experts discussed the impacts of COVID-19 on food security two years later. They noted that disruptions on food security have persisted and evolved, and called for a more systematic approach to address the multifaceted challenges of the pandemic alongside climate change, conflict and others.

Recorded Webinar

7 March 2022

Food systems transformation in action: The CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition

This high-level ministerial event during the Expo Dubai 2020, opened by Mr. Gabriel Ferrero, Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), sought to raise awareness to mobilise political commitments by governments, donors, civil society, private sector, and others for further promotion and implementation of the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on food systems and nutrition.

Recorded Webinar

24 February 2022

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Covid can shrink brain and damage its tissue, finds research

The first major study to compare brain scans of people before and after they catch Covid has revealed shrinkage and tissue damage in regions linked to smell and mental capacities months after subjects tested positive.

Linda Geddes and Ian Sample

The Guardian

7 March 2022

What is Japanese encephalitis and why is it spreading in Australia?

The mosquito-borne virus has been found in dozens of piggyeries and human cases have emerged. Who is at risk and how can you protect yourself?

Melissa Davey

The Guardian

7 March 2022

Scientists identify new gene differences in severe COVID-19 patients

Scientists have pinpointed 16 new genetic variants in people who developed severe COVID-19 in a large study that could help researchers develop treatments for very sick patients.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

8 March 2022

Detecting, monitoring heart disease gets an edge from AI with new lab at National Heart Centre

The National Heart Centre Singapore (NHCS) has launched a cardiac imaging research laboratory that harnesses artificial intelligence (AI) to detect and predict heart disease more quickly and precisely.

Lok Bing Hong

The Straits Times

8 March 2022

Hong Kong's zero-COVID fight takes mental toll on society, say experts

The mental wear and tear for many of the city's 7.4 million residents often comes not from getting the virus but from the policy and messaging from authorities, prompting panic and anxiety, health experts said.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

9 March 2022

WHO issues new guidelines on abortion to help countries deliver lifesaving care

The World Health Organization (WHO) is releasing new guidelines on abortion care today, in a bid to protect the health of women and girls and help prevent over 25 million unsafe abortions that currently occur each year.

WHO

9 March 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The Quad and regional health security: Implications and prospects for the Indo-Pacific

This report examines the Quad's health security initiatives. Although the Quad is only one institution among many playing the health diplomacy game, it has an outsized capacity to contribute to health security outcomes and diplomatic processes in the region due to, for instance, its medical resources and financial heft. It is thus worth assessing the challenges and opportunities for the Quad's health security initiatives, as well as what the Quad's evolving health security prong means for the wider region.

Amalina Anuar and Nazia Hussain

RSIS Policy Report

25 February 2022

Travel restrictions and variants of concern: Global health laws need to reflect evidence

Future reforms of global health law must account for the continuing impulse to enact travel restrictions, ensuring that international legal obligations reflect evolving public health evidence.

Benjamin Mason Meier et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 100, No. 3
2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

RSIS Webinar Series on "COVID-19 and Regional Multilateralism Around the Globe"

This RSIS Webinar Series will take stock of regional and global international multilateral organisations in 2022 and assess how they have been affected by nearly two years of pandemic amid other grave uncertainties and geopolitical shifts. Experts will investigate how regions have multilaterally responded to the crisis, what new issues are emerging, and what lessons ASEAN might learn from other regions/regional organisations' experiences and vice versa.

Recorded Webinar

25 February 2022

Mental Health In Asia

This comprehensive series will span across eight weeks featuring leading mental health practitioners in ASEAN. Participants can gain insights on the latest research and breakthrough in mental health studies and practices.

Webinar Series

March/April 2022

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

In this age of climate crisis, humanitarians need to learn to love tech

The emergency aid sector has been far too slow to seize on the technological tools that could revolutionise how it manages disasters. As the climate crisis further strains an already stretched humanitarian system, it must urgently wake up and scale up.

Devorah West

The New Humanitarian

23 February 2022

'It's like the wild west': Data security in frontline aid

This article discusses the unspoken power imbalance in data collection, why there is so much data, and what aid workers can do to better protect it.

Irwin Loy

The New Humanitarian

28 February 2022

Early warning systems hold the key to disaster management in West Africa

A project funded by the Adaptation Fund and implemented by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is improving West African climate adaptation and disaster management by developing region-wide early warning systems.

Zak Derler

Climate Home News

7 March 2022

UN relief chief outlines immediate humanitarian priorities for Ukraine

Allowing civilians to safely leave areas under fire in Ukraine, and delivering desperately needed aid to these locations, are among immediate priorities for humanitarians, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, told the Security Council.

UN News

7 March 2022

Crowdfunding disaster relief offers hope in desperate times. But who gets left behind?

While the urge to create crowdfunding campaigns, or donate to one, is understandable and admirable, it is worth asking: who can succeed in crowdfunding, and who gets left behind?

Matthew Wade

The Conversation

9 March 2022

Should natural disaster responses be part of the Australian Defence Force's job?

Some experts are wondering if constantly calling upon the ADF — a force with the primary task of fighting wars — is the best answer to disasters at home.

Tom Lowrey

ABC News

9 March 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Systemic risk

This report looks at the importance of the systemic impact of disaster risks. It argues that assessments that focus exclusively on known and easily quantified risks to individual nations are insufficient to deal with the systemic nature of risk with drivers like climate change.

Jana Sillmann et al.

UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

2022

Inclusive approaches to disaster risk management — A qualitative review

This report reviews inclusive approaches to disaster risk management (DRM) including supporting disadvantaged groups and creating empowering measures for marginalised people.

Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery

2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations

This webinar examines the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations and its use as a guide for humanitarian action in the face of climate and environmental crises and their humanitarian consequences. Speakers shared lessons learned on how the commitments can be translated into practice.

Recorded Webinar

30 September 2021

2022 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development

With this year's theme of 'From a Human Security Crisis Towards an Environment of Peace', this forum will explore policy approaches to address the intersection between environmental stress, human security and socio-intercultural interactions.

Event

23-25 May 2022

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

The world needs a plan—an equitable one—on climate migration

Already climbing, without more global action, climate change will displace more than 140 million people within their home countries by 2050. Governments need to work out potential solutions now before the numbers become overwhelming.

Nicole Greenfield

NRDC

16 February 2022

Gender-disaggregated data, crucial to ensuring Gender-sensitive response and recovery for displaced women and girls in disaster contexts

With gender being identified as one of the main factors that determine the experience of migration and displacement, it is all the more important that gender-disaggregated data is regularly collected, analysed and disseminated.

Hong Tran

International Organisation for Migration

3 March 2022

Act now to save lives and prevent migrants from going missing

With thousands of migrants going missing or dying along migration routes each year, states need to assume collective responsibility to save lives and prevent these occurrences and to search for and identify those who have gone missing and to assist their families.

António Vitorino et al

United Nations Network on Migration

7 March 2022

Five examples of gender-sensitive solutions to displacement linked with climate change

With more than half of the 55 million internally displaced people being women and girls, it is becoming increasingly important to address the issue using a gender-sensitive lens.

Alesia O'Connor

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

8 March 2022

In Lviv, Ukrainian volunteers shoulder humanitarian response, but for how long?

With millions of people displaced in Ukraine due to the ongoing invasion, local aid groups and civilian volunteers are at the centre of the humanitarian response. If the invasion continues, there are concerns on the sustainability of this volunteer-led civilian effort.

Sam Mednick

The New Humanitarian

10 March 2022

Europe, the 'Dark Continent,' is the stage for another great migration

With at least 2.5 million Ukrainians having fled Ukraine and another 2.5 million internally displaced, the world is facing another refugee crisis. This crisis may provide an opportunity to develop the architecture of refugee protection further.

Peter Gatrell

The New York Times

14 March 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Secretary-General's report on the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration

This report presents the updates of the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular migration as well as the related activities of the United Nations system and other institutional arrangements.

United Nations

2022

Forecasting asylum-related migration flows with machine learning and data at scale

This paper presents an adaptive machine learning algorithm that integrates administrative statistics and non-traditional data sources at scale to effectively forecast asylum-related migration flows.

Marcello Carammia, Stefano Maria Iacus & Teddy Wilkin

Nature Scientific Reports

2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tackling the Socio Economic Consequences of COVID-19 on Migrants and Communities

This webinar discussed the importance of integration as a potential factor in social cohesion for migrants, their host communities and their home communities.

Recorded Webinar

15 February 2022

The Impact of Our Evolving Climate on Migrants

This webinar looked at the gaps and emerging challenges of climate change and the current environmental conditions to migrants and actors working with them.

Recorded Webinar

23 February 2022