



ICLEI Response & Recovery

COVID-19 and the “New normal”



July 2020

ICLEI & Sustainability following COVID-19

The COVID-19 global pandemic has affected the entire world, as reported cases surpass 15 million, with an ebb and flow of lockdowns, social distancing and heightened hygiene measures that have touched all aspects of social and economic activity worldwide. The pandemic has revealed the need for social investments, the risks of weakening public services, the vulnerability of economic structures - especially informal ones - and the sharp inequalities of disadvantaged communities.

Equally though, communities and governments have recognized the importance of increased solidarity among citizens, the collaboration among institutions, the value in empowerment of local and regional governments, as well as multilevel governance response to crisis, and the benefit of public ownership of essential, critical services, access to digital services, and the need for decreased pollution, emissions, waste, and revitalization of natural assets.

Like other pandemics before it, the tectonic shifts in social values, economic and technological infrastructure and geo-politics will depend in part on the choices made for recovery, and on whether these will trigger and accelerate the transformation of human civilization from a fossil-fuel based, extraction-intensive, competition-dominated, capital-oriented, inequality-deepening model of the past centuries into renewable, nature-based, shared, decentralized and connected, value-oriented and fairness-based model that strives to respect the limits of the planet. As we see pandemic response shift from a health crisis to resilience management and socially equitable and economically viable sustainable development we expect major shifts in transport, health, retail, food, education, hospitality, real estate services and sectors, depending on the level of progress in digitalization and choices of local production and consumption. The economic consequences, in particular ownership, sharing of revenues and taxation of these new sectors will also provide significant impacts in the technical and economic viability of local governments.

The COVID-19 pandemic response can be recognized as a once-in-a-generation opportunity, if the global community can transfer the pandemic emergency response as an asset to deal with climate and nature emergencies – particularly as other extreme events continue to escalate, such as the Arctic reaching an unprecedented +38°C. Good practices abound of progressive measures in public service investment, from electric and non-motorized mobility, rapid digitalization of services, solidarity program roll-out, and intensive peer-sharing of information, to the implementation of principles and policies from global processes on sustainability, disaster risk reduction and sustainable urban development.

The opportunities and challenges of the urban world reveal that the success and failure of the road through COVID-19 pandemic will significantly also rely on whether local and regional governments follow progressive practices, empowered with the necessary technical, legal and financial mechanisms, and supported with multilevel and collaborative governance models, to stay connected through global mechanisms and seize the potential of emerging social and technological innovation

How has ICLEI responded to the COVID-19 pandemic?

ICLEI teams were engaged in a wide variety of efforts for sharing of information, networking and providing technical support to local governments during the crisis. ICLEI's 24 offices around the world have rapidly adapted to the new reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, and are offering resources to help cities, towns and regions on the frontline of the pandemic.

ICLEI offices have redesigned most of their services, projects and initiatives to be delivered fully or partly through remote and virtual means, thereby rapidly ushering in a new, more climate-friendly work ethic which in many ways will become part of the new normal of servicing our Members.

ICLEI hosted 20+ [webinars](#) and podcasts, released 5 new websites, 30+ [blogs](#) and newsletters, and engaged or endorsed around 10 other global and regional initiatives. ICLEI teams worldwide were engaged in a wide variety of networking efforts to provide technical support and share information, and will transfer those experiences and lessons into guidance for improved services to its Members and leadership. ICLEI's COVID-19 Response: https://iclei.org/en/covid19_resources.html

How will ICLEI connect sustainable transformation to COVID-19 recovery?

The COVID-19 pandemic is demonstrating the **necessity, value and benefit of sustainability** in our daily lives - the very essence of what ICLEI has advocated for and actioned locally across the world for 3 decades since its founding. Such recognition offers opportunities to expand and deepen collaboration with our Members and partners to holistically implement **ICLEI's 5 Pathways to Sustainability**, which have **never been more relevant and urgent than now**:

[- Nature based development](#)

[- Low emission development](#)

[- Resilience development](#)

[- Equitable and people centered](#)

[- Circular economy development](#)

[development](#)

The integrated approach of the ICLEI Pathways sets forth the standard of multidisciplinary areas to be tackled, as well as the respective ICLEI offerings under each. As the offerings expand in the mid-term, more richly influenced by COVID-19 experiences to encompass a greater variation of activities, the **Equitable and People Centered Pathway** will be developed out to meet the sustainability service benefits of reducing inequalities, and the **Resilience Pathway** will incorporate recovery guidance to enrich methodology provided.

The global ICLEI network will also continue to engage and feed the development of improvements through discussions and the innovative programing at upcoming exchanges, such as [Daring Cities 2020](#) (fully virtual) and the [ICLEI World Congress 2021](#), fostering and inspiring other actors to drive change in local and regional government access to solution providers and innovative financing mechanisms.