Is Covid-19 Setting the Stage for UN Agenda 2030? In Pursuit of the Trajectory

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Abstract The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has caused much havoc across the world. It has upended lives and livelihoods and created a state of despair. Many countries are still reeling from the impact of the pandemic. Notwithstanding this, the pandemic has also exposed mankind to a startling reality - specifically the fundamental weaknesses in our global system, the prevalence of poverty, the lack of social-protection mechanisms to protect the most vulnerable, weak health systems and above all the need for global cooperation. The on-going crisis has also re-enforced the interdependence of our world and has brought to the fore the urgent need for global action to meet people’s basic needs, to save our planet and to build a fairer and more secure world, all of which have been canvassed within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The chapter explores issues relating to the pandemic and their implications for sustainable development. It seeks to draw parallels between the two by arguing that the crisis, despite its ferocity, has proved an opportunity for mankind to ramp up actions necessary to achieve the SDGs. This is evidenced by the spirit of solidarity, the global network of innovations, and the synchronised efforts and the shared vision being displayed by civil society, private sector, and governments.

1 Introduction

The chapter explores issues relating to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and their implications for sustainable development. It does this through the lens of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 which calls for action to end poverty, the protection of the planet and a desire for people to enjoy peace and prosperity by the year 2030. The issues the chapter engages in are manifold: Firstly, it explores the...
nature of the pandemic and examines the sort of arrangement it is fostering on the world today. It also provides an insight into how the pandemic has spiked an uncertainty, a situation which has since led to the strengthening of global cooperation, the embrace of humanity and the desire to forge ahead with capabilities that can strengthen innovative ideas.

In the light of this, the chapter advances some questions: Is Covid-19 shining a light on our underlying mind-sets and behaviour? Will we come out of this as a changed world, and, a world for the better? How can we get our communities and economies back on track and in what condition can we have them? Would be able to meet the measures of sustainability as a result of what is currently happening?

The questions listed are provided as a framework for the analysis rather than as research questions that are explicitly answered. The issues raised by them are threaded into the analysis that follows, which explores the advent of the pandemic and the impact it has had on people, governments, businesses and the environment as a whole. It also looks at the resilience shown by people, the innovative spirit being inculcated and displayed by people and the deep sense of humanistic tendencies that have evolved since the pandemic began.

The chapter approaches this inquiry through the following themes: Resilience, Leadership, Innovation and Humanity. These themes were arbitrarily chosen because they seem to be standalone pillars through which the current crisis can be seen. The chapter begins with an introduction to the pandemic. It then assesses the SDG goals in order to gauge the parallels between the current happenings and the fulfilment of SDGs. After that, the chapter evaluates the thematic strands to see the development in the wake of the pandemic. The stage is then set for a discussion before the conclusion comes in.

2 The Coronavirus Pandemic

The coronavirus (COVID-19) was identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and recognised as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (WHO 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a massive spike in uncertainty (Baker et al. 2020) Travelling has virtually ground to a halt, sporting activities have been cancelled and many parts of the world have experienced lockdowns all in an attempt to stem the tide of the pandemic (Johnson and Boone 2020; LePan 2020). Since the outbreak, numerous communities have been devastated, services industries continue to suffer, jobs have been lost, families have been torn apart, economic and social activities have slowed down as the world battles to find a remedy for the pandemic (Johnson and Boone 2020). There has also been a huge economic impact of the coronavirus on financial markets and vulnerable industries such as manufacturing, tourism, hospitality and aviation (Baker et al. 2020).

Although pandemics have occurred over the years, covid-19 seems to have taken may countries by surprise in view of its scale and the sheer havoc it is causing (Solberg and Akufo-Addo 2020). It has left everyone in no doubt that it is no
respects of person or country as developed countries especially, and many important personalities have contracted and died from the disease (Berg 2020; Brown 2020). Major uncertainties surround almost every aspect of this pandemic. The issue around this pandemic ranges from its prevalence and lethality; the incapacity of healthcare systems to meet this extraordinary challenge; the ultimate size of the mortality shock; the duration and ineffectiveness of social distancing, market lockdowns, and the inadequacy of other mitigation and containment strategies; the near-term economic impact of the pandemic and policy responses; the long stretch of recovery as the pandemic recedes, among others (Baker et al. 2020).

The pandemic has also fomented significant social and political consequences. In the US, some American-Asians are bearing the brunt. They are reportedly being discriminated against on the grounds that they are carriers of the virus (Zhou et al. 2020). The current situation has also revealed racial disparities in the U.S. healthcare system where the disease is reportedly killing many African-Americans, many of whom are deemed to lack medical adequate medical care (Connley 2020). In China, some Africans were maligned and subjected to harassment because some Chinese people felt they could be carrying the virus (HRW 2020). Meanwhile, social distancing and the closure of schools and childcare to combat the spread of coronavirus also created additional pressures on working parents and students alike.

The challenging and uncertain time has generated many debates. These have centred on: the source of the crisis; humanity and what it pertains; how to navigate the crisis and build a better, more sustainable world; the role of government and the needed economic approaches that can spearhead development and keep economies afloat after the pandemic.

3 Pandemic Preparedness

The Global Health Security (GHS) Index 2019 has indicated that it is likely that the world would continue to face health outbreaks since most countries are ill-positioned to combat epidemics in view of their fundamentally weak national health security systems. The report fundamentally makes a huge impression of what is happening today. One significant aspect of this report is the supposition that it makes - that the same scientific advances that help fight epidemic disease also have allowed pathogens to be engineered or recreated in laboratories and that disparities in capacity and inattention to biological threats among some leaders have exacerbated preparedness gaps.

Several conspiracy theories have circled around covid-19 and how it came about. In some instances, covid-19 has been described as a hoax (Sullivan 2020). Unlike most other natural disasters, pandemics do not remain geographically contained, and damages can be mitigated significantly through prompt intervention (LePan 2020). The pandemics have increased over the past years because of increased global travel and integration, urbanisation, changes in land use, and greater exploitation of the natural environment (Morse 1995). Indeed, the same pathways of global commerce
and other aspects of the world’s integration become the transmission vectors for disease (LePan 2020).

4 What is the Current Situation?

Despite the huge concerns over covid-19 as a threat to humanity, it has seemingly recreated a new sense of humanity by rekindling the human spirit. In many parts of the world, a real sense of camaraderie is showing. People have also shown a great sense of gratitude to health workers and other front-line workers who have been helping to battle this disease. Vulnerable people are also being assisted in the course of the pandemic.

The current phenomenon also seems to be subjecting the role of the state to a lot of scrutiny. The vulnerabilities occasioned by the pandemic has alerted and tasked governments to do more for their citizens, albeit, on a larger scale than what currently prevails. But nowhere has this been played out much more than in developing countries where structural inequality, extreme poverty, lack of amenities, poor governance issues and social disharmony, among others, often tend to have a foothold. In many of these places, with their extremely large informal economy, most workers survive on daily wages and have no savings or stockpiles of food. They also lack social safety nets like unemployment insurance. These vulnerable people, often left out of any contributory schemes, work as traders, labourers or craftsmen in the informal sector, and in Africa, they account for as much as 85 percent of employment across the African continent, (George and Houreld 2020).

Many governments with an eye for reviving their economies are now racing to implement economic stimulus and support packages to keep individuals, businesses and economies afloat.

4.1 Business

Whilst almost every business is faced with navigating the current landscape for their long-term survival, there are also short-term challenges and opportunities that ought to be addressed. For now, the intentions of business are becoming clearer by the day - there are those who have furloughed their staff, others have laid off their workers without any compensation, whilst some companies have ramped up their efforts to support covid-19 relief and also support their workers. With keenness, people now keep watch over which companies are stepping up at this time and also those ones failing society. In all likelihood, it seems, the way companies act now will eventually affect the way people perceive them in the near future. Hence, the decisions businesses make today will define them well after this pandemic has passed, which only reinforces the importance of leading with integrity, honesty, compassion and, ultimately pursuing objectives that lie much in societal interest. The support and
cooperation of the private sector, as a driving force for development, is much more than needed now to improve and maintain the living conditions of people and societies altogether.

The envisaged corporate contributions are most often discussed in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Sarpong 2017). Concerns about and the need for CSR have grown significantly during the past decades and the current situation, to some extent makes a case for that. One of the core components of CSR is about putting a human face on business entities by communicating empathy, having an understanding and support for societal concerns. Such values have a place in this time of uncertainty and anxiety. For top business personnel and companies that have seized the moments, playing more pro-active roles by getting involved in environmental and societal strategies, collaborating with governmental and civil institutions as well as with international organisations represents a duty unsurpassed and a good corporate citizenship.

It is, therefore, heartening to see major corporations, including those beginning to make their mark in the business community, assisting in diverse ways. Companies like Gap and Zara are now producing masks in their sourced factories, with General Motors and Ford building ventilators. Meanwhile, leaders from some of the companies most affected by the pandemic, particularly those working with airlines, are forfeiting their pay as the pandemic worsens. These leaders include the co-founders of Lyft, executives at Airbnb, and the CEO of Marriott. Disney’s Executive Chairman Bob Iger is forgoing his salary for 2020, while the top five Comcast executives are donating theirs to charity (Brandt 2020).

These happenings have reinforced the notion that businesses should be a meaningful partner of the community in which they operate in and, to the extent their finances would allow, contribute to the wellbeing of their stakeholders. The world of business indeed possesses unique responsibilities and offers much potential for achieving just and compassionate care relations in the broadest sense (Sarpong 2018a, 2018b) and as Gaylin (1976) indicates, caring is biologically embedded in the human species as a mechanism for its survival, continuation and an on-going development.

4.2 Funds

In many countries, funds have been set up to seek for donations to fight the pandemic.

These funds have attracted donations from both private and public sector institutions, individuals and other organisations. In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the ‘PM Cares’ fund to provide relief to those affected by the coronavirus and to help millions of poor workers caught up by a nationwide lockdown (Kalra and Ulmer 2020). In March 2020, U.S. lawmakers also agreed on the passage of a $2 trillion stimulus bill called the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act to lessen the impact of an economic downturn.
set in motion by the global coronavirus pandemic. Other countries have followed suit all in a bid to provide relief to vulnerable people within their countries and localities.

4.3 Solidarity

The solidarity and generosity of people and organisations everywhere has been quite remarkable. China donated ventilators, masks and sent medics to a number of countries, whilst some countries have also come to the aid of others. Hundreds of researchers around the world have also been collaborating with other research centres to develop vaccines. Private individuals have also shown a high level of philanthropy by donating various items from food to Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to less privileged people and even to government agencies.

Such care and support can be framed within the ethics of care. The ethics of care has become a distinct moral theory or normative approach, relevant to global and political matters as well as to the personal relations that can most clearly exemplify care (Held 2005). It deals with the relational aspect of human life (Sarpong 2018a, b). Ethics of care starts from the fundamental position of the relationality of all humans with each other and the environment and the interweaving of multiple relationships as the basic human condition throughout life (Hawk 2011). Schuman (2001) has argued that aside from our own needs, we must also be of help to those people in our web of relationships, which include the people with whom we have close relationships with as well as those in the larger communities in which we live in. Proponents of ethics of care have emphasised the roles of mutual interdependence and emotional response that play an important part in our moral lives (Sarpong 2018a, b).

4.4 Pollution

Since the onset of the pandemic and the subsequent shutdown of many economic activities, emissions from fossil fuel combustion have dropped substantially in many countries (Stone 2020). India, for instance, experienced a significant decline in some pollutants following the lockdown. The skyline in Venice, Italy also became more visible since the lockdown. In China, emissions reportedly fell by 25% as people were instructed to stay at home (Henriques 2020). The visible cloud of toxic gas hanging over industrial powerhouses almost disappeared in major Chinese cities between January and February 2020 (Wright 2020). In Europe, satellite images showed nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) emissions fading away over northern Italy following the lockdown. A similar story played out in Spain and the UK.

High levels of air pollution is currently seen as one of the most important contributors to deaths from Covid-19, according to research conducted by Martin...
Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in Germany (Carrington 2020). The analysis showed that of the coronavirus deaths across 66 administrative regions in Italy, Spain, France and Germany, 78% of them occurred in just five regions, and these were the most polluted. The results indicate that long-term exposure to NO₂ may be one of the most important contributors to fatality caused by the Covid-19 virus in these regions and maybe across the whole world.

The next section examines how the recent issues play in the SDGs. The chapter, therefore, delves into the requirements of the 17 goals as against the present happenings. SDGs target the 5Ps (people, planet, prosperity (originally profit), peace and partnership) and encompass seventeen goals which are of importance to everyone in the world. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focuses on sustainable agenda and action plan for people, planet and prosperity (UN 2015, 2018).

The UN recognises the important role stakeholders play in implementing sustainable development and in shifting the world on to a sustainable and resilient path (UN 2015, 2018).

5 The consequences of Covid-19 and SDGs

The presence of the pandemic has strengthened the course being charted by sustainable development goals which call for improvements in the way we live (Solberg and Akufo-Addo 2020). Many calls have been made in recent times for a conscious attempt to be made in taking the bold and transformative steps needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path (UN 2015). Besides, the need for governments and societies at large to the provision of support and encouragement to people, the need to tackle vulnerability, the determination of increased health care and community engagement, progress in environmental conditions and the realisation that the world should act in collaborative partnership, it can be inferred that the role of the SDGs has been greatly heightened by the pandemic as a trajectory to shape the future through its goals (Solberg and Akufo-Addo 2020).

To some extent, the coronavirus seems to be the ‘transformational’ agent, in that, it disrupts just about everything that humans are used to and offers an opportunity for us to fall in line with the goals of sustainable development. The UN proposes 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, mainly within the economic, social and environmental dimensions. Some actions from individuals, governments and businesses since the pandemic began, have to a large extent, helped in attaining some of the objectives of the SDGs (see Table 1).

The responses to the issues raised in Table 1 may not be deemed as absolute or adequate responses to the requirements of the SDGs. Despite that, they mark a considerable shift from the pre-covid-19 era. Whilst not all the goals can be fulfilled for now, the shift towards their accomplishment, in a sense, is quite remarkable. This is in view of the need to adhere to the goals as a means to ensure a better world. What the chapter seeks to point out are the changes that have occurred following the
Table 1 17 SDGs and the role of the pandemic

| SDG | Outcome |
|-----|---------|
| SDG1: No poverty | This goal seems a tough call, however, many individuals and organisations are helping to ease the issues regarding poverty. Much more efforts are now being put in the light of the observed vulnerabilities arising from the pandemic. Governments have also prepared economic stimulus packages to aid sectors affected by the pandemic. Although poverty cannot been ended outright, the fact that many governments are now much more opened to the idea of ending poverty is worth noting. |
| SDG2: Zero hunger | The need to ensure the entire food ecosystem is safe, nutritious, and sustainable has become even more critical. The low inventory in some grocery shops during the pandemic points to the fact that the entire food system cannot pause. Covid-19 has exposed how vulnerable our global food systems are. Many countries are now realising the benefits of having food security and sustainable agriculture as a major backbone of their economies. The pandemic has accelerated the risk of famine as lockdown measures affected incomes and trade. This calls for more investment in agricultural research to improve yields, develop drought-resistant crops, early warning systems, and promote sustainable farming methods. It is important more than ever to make food systems more resilient so that our most vulnerable people are better placed to cope with the next drought, flood or plague. |
| SDG3: Good Health and Well-being | The pandemic provides a watershed moment for health emergency preparedness and for investment in critical twenty-first century public services. It has also become obvious to many governments that comprehensive medical care needs to be provided for their citizens. The advent of the pandemic has helped to widen the scope of actors and efforts, in order to ensure that no one is left behind due to lack of access to health care and healthy lifestyle options. |
| SDG4: Quality education | The full ramifications of COVID-19 on education and learning are still unfolding. There is now a shift to online teaching among major educational establishments. We are at a point where half of the global population doesn’t have internet access. To mitigate this, the global Education coalition was founded in the early days of the COVID-19 crisis to find and implement distance learning strategies that |

(continued)
| SDG                                                                 | Outcome                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SDG5: Gender equality                                             | Though there is limited development in terms of how the pandemic impacts on this goal, it can be recognised that the pandemic gives an opportunity for radical positive action to redress longstanding inequalities in multiple areas of women’s lives and to build a more just and resilient world. SDG5 is a lofty goal with many unique complexities. The COVID-19 pandemic underscores society’s reliance on women both on the front line and at home, while simultaneously exposing structural inequalities across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection. Responding to the pandemic is not just about rectifying longstanding inequalities, but also about building a resilient world in the interest of everyone with women at the centre of recovery |
| SDG6: Clean water and sanitation;                                 | SDG 6 focuses on clean, accessible water for all. The goal aims to address water scarcity, poor water quality and inadequate sanitation globally. The essence of using clean water has been a major concern to health authorities, especially in many developing countries, where hygiene levels are less followed. Since the pandemic, many of these countries have offered free treated water to their citizenry as a means to prevent the occurrence of the pandemic and also to lessen the burden with the cost of paying for such a service. Fumigation has also been taking place in many areas like markets and social places in order to keep such places free from any disease |
| SDG7: Affordable and clean energy                                 | There is the need for international cooperation to bridge the energy access gap and the placement of sustainable energy at the heart of |
Table 1  (continued)

| SDG                                             | Outcome                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SDG8: Decent Work and economic growth           | Disadvantaged groups are already suffering disproportionately from the adverse effects of the pandemic. The pandemic could also hamper people’s income generating activities as many are now out of work. For the millions of vulnerable people whose livelihoods hang in the balance, an ambitious commitment by the state to confront these challenges will be decisive. Now is a good time to restructure and rebuild the systems we have in place. Implicit in the framings of the economic crisis due to COVID-19 is an expectation of the future where we await economic growth. |
| SDG9: Industry, Innovation and infrastructure   | The COVID-19 pandemic is primarily a health issue in which scientific advancement and research breakthroughs play a central role. The development of new, affordable, and effective vaccines and treatments have become key priorities. Smart technological breakthroughs and tracing and tracking systems are being developed, as are technologies that improve analytical and decision-making processes. The research and development that underpins scientific advance are leading to international collaboration between the private sector, the scientific community and research universities, and governments. Innovations and production of items to fight off the pandemic have intensified of late. |
| SDG10: Reduced inequalities                     | The pandemic has highlighted the deep inequalities around the world in terms of access to certain services. Communities have realised the enormity of this and have rallied together to support vulnerable people by providing them with their basic needs. Meanwhile, governments are setting up funds and also providing economic stimulus packages to help in addressing the issue. Interventions seeking to cushion the gap between the haves and have-nots are now being given some consideration. |

Now is a good time to restructure and rebuild the systems we have in place. Implicit in the framings of the economic crisis due to COVID-19 is an expectation of the future where we await economic growth. The pandemic could also hamper people’s income generating activities as many are now out of work. For the millions of vulnerable people whose livelihoods hang in the balance, an ambitious commitment by the state to confront these challenges will be decisive.
Table 1 (continued)

| SDG | Outcome |
|-----|---------|
| SDG11: Sustainable cities and communities | Stories are being highlighted about everyday acts of kindness. From small gestures to big projects, ordinary people are making a lasting difference in the lives of those around them. Besides there has been improved resilience in communities. |
| SDG12: Responsible consumption and production | Excessive production has dwindled. Major retail outlets have suspended their operations. Consumption seems to be more responsible than ever. The pandemic offers countries an opportunity to build recovery plans that will reverse current trends of irresponsible consumption and change our production patterns towards a more sustainable future. |
| SDG13: Climate action | There has been a massive reduction in emissions and pollutants owing to less industrial activities and travels of late. Clean and abundant fresh water, healthy oceans and a stable climate are arguably the foundation of all the other socio-economic goals which, to some extent, the pandemic has brought about. |
| SDG14: Life below water | The lockdown has led to less pollution. What prevails now are productive land, clean and abundant fresh water, healthy oceans and a stable climate, which are arguably the foundation of all the other socio-economic goals. |
| SDG15: Life on land | Less industrial activities are leading to less environmental problems. Pollution is at its barest in heavily polluted places like India and Italy. |
| SDG16: Peace, justice and strong institutions | The world is pulling together. Ceasefires have been declared through some major confrontations during the pandemic era. Saudi Arabia announced a ceasefire in Yemen with the Houthi rebels. Shia militants also announced a ceasefire with the Americans. The pandemic has been able to put armed conflict on lockdown and ensured people rather focus on it. |
| SDG17: Partnerships for the goals | Interventions are bolstering togetherness. Confronting the pandemic has required coordinated global humanitarian and socio-economic responses. Addressing this crisis requires worldwide collaboration and partnerships, across all aspects of the response. |

Source: Author
outbreak of the pandemic, albeit temporarily. It does not seek to indicate that these shifts that could remain permanent.

6 Outcome of Pandemic

The chapter recognises four strands that can be developed from the responses to the covid-19 pandemic - Resilience, Innovation, Leadership and Humanity- as strands from the residues of the pandemic. The constructs of resilience, innovation, leadership and humanity are examined in order to see their defining roles and what they hold for society.

6.1 Resilience

The pandemic has provided a lot of lessons for mankind. It has revealed our state of preparedness in the face of a case of this magnitude. It has helped us to appreciate our coping skills and to find resilience in terms of what we do. The literature advocates a number of variables that denote resilience. According to Henderson and Milstein (1996), resilience is the ability to recover from negative life experiences and to become stronger whilst overcoming adversity. This is the position that a lot of people can identify with as at now. Survival, recovery, and thriving are concepts associated with resilience and often describe the stage at which a person may be, during or after facing adversity (Ledesma 2014). These attributes have become the refrain in recent times as people strive for the best despite the glaring hardships they face in the wake of lockdowns and failings within the social system.

Magis (2010, p. 401) describes the resilience displayed by communities as ‘existence, development and engagement of community resources by community members to thrive in an environment characterised by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise.’ It is also seen by Berkes and Ross (2013) as a social system’s capacity to unite and collaborate toward a shared goal or objective. Resilience and thriving provide positive self-esteem, hardiness, strong coping skills, a sense of coherence, self-efficacy, optimism, strong social resources, adaptability, risk-taking, low fear of failure, determination, perseverance and a high tolerance of uncertainty (Bonanno 2004; Ungar 2004; Masten 2005).

The concept of ‘thriving’ refers to a person’s ability to go beyond his or her original level of level of functioning and to grow and function despite repeated exposure to stressful experiences. Recent studies in resilience have started to look at the concept of ‘thriving.’ Thriving is grounded on an individual’s positive transformation resulting from the experience of adversity (Nishikawa 2006). The belief that “people are capable of transmuting traumatic experiences to gain wisdom, personal growth, positive personality changes, or more meaningful and productive lives has
been a central theme in centuries of literature, poetry, and personal narratives.’ (Saakvitne et al. 1998, p. 281).

As already alluded to, the construct of resilience argues that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how we deal with it (Moore 2020). When we face adversity, misfortune, or frustration, resilience helps us to retrace our steps in a bid to recover quickly from the said difficulties. It helps us to survive, recover, and even work out a recovery in the face of misfortune. The resilience to the Covid-19 pandemic as at now reflects the massive human attempt to find solutions to the huge difficulties being experienced.

### 6.2 Leadership

The pandemic has also brought to the fore questions regarding leadership in both governance and industry. It created leadership challenges for leaders at all levels of governments and industries (CCL 2020). Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations around the globe demonstrated remarkable agility, changing business models literally overnight: setting up remote-work arrangements; offshoring entire business processes to less-affected geographies; initiating multi-company cooperation to redeploy furloughed employees across sectors (Renjen 2020). In each situation, the urgency for results prevailed over traditional bureaucratic responses.

Within the political arena, there have leaders who felt the need to take immediate action when the issue came up, others, meanwhile, were a bit slow in terms of how to react. Some Americans were embittered by the slow response and inconsistencies in the responses from the erratic leadership of the Trump Administration, which devalued and often refused to follow the advice of his scientific advisers (Bennhold 2020). Other countries have won praise for their swiftness in tackling the pandemic. What has emerged from the current situation is that good leadership is invaluable to the sustainability and progress of a country. The action that some took yielded good result, whilst others had difficulties stemming the tide of the pandemic because of their inaction earlier on.

### 6.3 Innovation

A lot of ingenuity has been on display since the coronavirus pandemic occurred. Many people have worked through various means to help find solutions to the nagging problems associated with the pandemic. It has been a moment in time for people to stretch the limits of their abilities and the boundaries of their creative capacities. The pandemic has also led to a situation where people had to improvise to produce extraordinary things to help in fighting the impact of Covid-19.

In places where personal protective equipment (PPE) were in short supply, factories sprang up overnight to produce these items. Health robes, medical scrubs
and medical gowns were produced locally by some garment manufacturing companies in many countries. For instance, a consultant anaesthetist at Carmarthen, South Wales, UK was so ‘desperately concerned’ about the lack of ventilators to treat Covid-19 patients that he went on to design his own. Initiatives to help improve people’s conditions during the pandemic also gained momentum. Jamaican student, Rayvon Stewart developed a device to sanitise door knobs which uses ultraviolet light to kill harmful micro-organisms, thereby reducing the risk of contagion. Meanwhile, Apple and Google, two of the richest and most successful competitors also teamed up on a project to help health care experts track patterns of exposure to the coronavirus using bluetooth. Tesla, a car manufacturer, also produced ventilators to aid covid-19 victims.

6.4 Humanity

The crisis has revealed the competence and generosity of those who are in frontline care and are quite keen to do their best for the afflicted in society. We have also seen the generosity of people, organisations and governments working hand-in-hand with each other. Hence, community engagement and solidarity exemplified by the relationality of mankind has been commonplace. People checked on each other and also helped in feeding the less privileged ones in society during the pandemic. The amazing initiatives that took place around the world, from the very small acts of kindness that people showed towards each other to big donations from say, private organisations, churches and hotels supplying empty rooms for quarantined people during this tragedy, are all testimonies of what humanity brought into people. Many people ramped up their responses to the pandemic though philanthropic efforts to fulfil a role that should mostly be played by government. The moments of crisis highlighted how important people’s priorities are to serve humanity.

7 Forging Ahead

But what are the deeper lessons from the coronavirus pandemic that can help companies, society and governments to be more sustainable going forward? The rapid global spread of a novel coronavirus has taught us that we are all interconnected in terms of our health and well-being and that our collective well-being is fundamental. If there was any doubt that our world faces common challenges, this pandemic should categorically put that to rest. The crisis has re-enforced the interdependence of our world and also brought to the fore the urgent need for global action to meet people’s basic needs, to save our planet and to build a fairer and resilient world (Solberg and Akufo-Addo 2020). It has also provided a basis for us to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world
onto a sustainable and resilient path. This is what the SDGs, the global blueprint to end poverty, protect our planet and ensure prosperity, are all about.

From the earlier discussions, we are left in no doubt that covid-19 has ensured a commonality among people. It has shown us how fragile the world is (Sarpong 2018b) and the vulnerabilities of our interconnected and global economy (Baubion 2013). At the same time, its challenges have helped us to pursue advancements in science and technology as well as medicine by seeking remedies for the virus. It has also brought to the fore the importance of establishing and improving upon the social safety net mechanisms especially in developing countries. Many countries have fallen out on this and would have to improve the conditions of their people.

More particularly, development agencies, national governments, civil society and the private sector need to come together in a global effort to create a conducive situation where people can enjoy fulfilling lives. How we do this will be very crucial for mankind because the SDGs have a powerful call: that no one should be left behind mankind’s development. That is why we need to act now taking into consideration the lines of action that can lead us towards the universal agenda for people, planet and prosperity that the SDGs advocate for. Through such activities, we can strengthen universal peace in larger freedom.

8 Conclusion

The rapid spread of Covid-19 has generated a global public health crisis which is being addressed at various local and global scales through various measures. The chapter explored issues relating to the pandemic and their implications for sustainable development. It did this through the lens of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 which calls for action to end poverty, the protection of the planet and a desire for people to enjoy peace and prosperity by the year 2030. The issues the chapter explored were meant to provide a basis for us to know what the current situation holds for our future endeavours. It was also to bring to the fore the impetus that this covid-19 has led to, especially the embrace of humanity and the desire to forge ahead with capabilities that can strengthen innovative ideas.

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