

COMMENT: The COVID-19 Global Pandemic
Finding Sustainable Solutions for Recovery from the Pandemic

[Dr Ted Christie](#), 17 June 2020



Disclosure Statement

Ted Christie does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations

KEY WORDS: COVID-19; sustainable development; Impacts: global health (*environmental*) – economic – social - cultural; SDG 3; multi-objective analysis

SUMMARY: *The COVID-19 pandemic has become a classic sustainable development problem to resolve. Effective actions and measures to resolve infection, recovery and mortality rates must be counterbalanced against economic, social, and cultural impacts.*

In this regard, are the Targets of the UNs Sustainable Development Goal 3 appropriate? Or should countries seek their own national sustainable development methodology and strategy?

The impacts of COVID-19 have now extended beyond being a significant global health risk:

*COVID-19 has now become
a classic problem for **sustainable development**
Adverse economic, social, and cultural impacts
now pose additional longer-term problems
for national Governments
to find feasible and viable global solutions
especially for any predicted global recession that may arise.*

The [World Bank Group \(2020\)](#) has described the coronavirus as one: “that triggered a localized shock in China [and] is now delivering a significant global shock”.

The World Bank Group has undertaken a study that simulates the potential impact of COVID-19 on gross domestic product and trade by modelling the global shock. The diversity of economic impacts that are being modelled in their study clearly illustrate the scope of future economic challenges for government:

- *“Underutilization of labour and capital;*
- *An increase in international trade costs;*
- *A drop in travel services; and*
- *A redirection of demand away from activities that require proximity between people”.*

But there are also social and cultural considerations for the flow-on impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. They add a more complex dimension to the problems confronting government:

- *The UN World Food Program has warned that in Latin America, one of the world's most vulnerable regions, [the effect of the coronavirus pandemic](#) is forecast to push more than 14 million people into extreme hunger; and*
- *In addition, rising levels in the number of cases of coronavirus infections in Brazil, Peru, Chile, Mexico and elsewhere are stretching hospitals thin, increasingly in poor urban and remote rural communities.*

The UN Sustainable Development Goal 3 and COVID-19 Impacts

The bottom line for finding sustainable solutions requires the multiple and competing objectives of sustainable development – *economic, social (including cultural) and environmental (for COVID-19, global health risks)* - to be assessed and balanced.

Sustainable Development Goal 3 (“SDG 3”) of the “UNs 2020 Agenda for Sustainable Development” aims to “*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*”: SDG 3 has 13 Targets.

However the *economic and social (including cultural) impacts* that flow on from the global COVID-19 pandemic do not necessarily fall within the scope of any of the 13 specific Targets of SDG 3.

As the global health impacts of the global pandemic become effectively managed through preventative actions and measures taken throughout the world, increasing attention by national Governments will have to be directed at

sustainable development in the *recovery phase* from the pandemic.

Given that one of the worst recessions in history has been predicted to be a flow-on impact of the global pandemic, the challenge for Government posed by economic, social, and cultural impacts makes the problem even more complex.

But these impacts represent an additional need for critical review and action as the focus for managing the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic moves away from the past pathways: To address global health risk in terms of ***infection/ recovery/mortality*** as the paramount need from the outset of the outbreak and the *response* to the pandemic.

*But economic, social, and cultural impacts arising from the pandemic
will have to be counter-balanced
against global health risks
in order to find sustainable solutions for the future.*

Sustainable Development Methodology

*For the recovery phase
from the COVID-19 global pandemic
should each WHO Member State
be required to prepare and implement
its own national sustainable development strategy?*

If this is the case, finding sustainable solutions for the pandemic will requires national Governments to decide on the appropriate methodology and strategy for them to adopt.

The methodology would have to be one that is generally accepted as a reliable body of knowledge by being consistent with the standards and criteria of science; and to be an effective decision-making aid for finding sustainable solutions.

Multi-objective methodology is a well-accepted procedure that has long been used as a decision-making aid to resolve sustainable development for public-sector environmental and planning issues.

Conclusion

One view of the multi-objective analysis methodology is that because most public-sector problems involve multiple conflicting objectives — whether in environmental policy, water resources, energy, or public health — the opportunity of the methodology for evaluating sustainable development outcomes is unlimited.

Dr Ted Christie has posted a number of articles on this topic on the web, as well as a book Chapter dealing with “sustainability and the environment”.

A Google search of the key words:

[climate change sustainable development multi-objective-analysis](#) – turns up over 80,000,000 results.

★ The author’s article appears as #1 on Google page 1.