Key messages and quotes for social media and press

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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Report on Cities and Pandemics:
Towards a more just, green and healthy future

CHAPTER 1.
Rethinking the form and function of the city

Garbage Collectors wearing face masks during Corona Virus Pandemic in Cape Town, South Africa © Shutterstock

Key actions

Regional scale:

- **Strengthen coordination between cities, regions and territories through the creation of shared decision-making platforms.** The establishment of regional boards with the mandate and power to cooperate, unify and manage networks of cities or urban agglomerations could help address these gaps.

- **Adopt environmental protection measures, such as blue-green networks, landscape belts and urban growth boundaries,** to limit land use conversion and reduce ecosystem deterioration. This will reduce risks of zoonotic diseases spread and chronic exposure to harmful levels of air pollution and so lessen susceptibility to respiratory diseases. By protecting valuable agricultural land from encroachment, blue-green networks will help ensure the **continued proximity of farming and food production to city consumers.**

- **Impose strict planning guidelines that prioritize air quality and public health.**

- **Improve connectivity within cities and regions through national urban policies and plans** that secure flow and movement of goods, services and labour also during crisis**.** Bridging existing divides and promoting a holistic expansion of regional infrastructure, both physical and digital, will also help reduce the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

- **Governments should incentivize investment in localized means of production for essential provisions** such as food and medical supply chains, building regional resilience to sudden shocks in global supply chains.

City scale:

- **Transform urban weak spots, both systemic (such as car-based movement systems) and area based (such as informal settlements) to improve resilience to future shocks.**

- **Promote equitable access to urban services and amenities through compact, well-planned densities and mixed-use city structures** that also encourage healthy lifestyles and community cohesion and enable a level of resilience to the impacts of the pandemic without compromising liveability.

- **Transition towards more pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use, diverse and compact city plans,** away from automobile-oriented models with single land uses, will create more flexible and adaptive urban forms to respond to future pandemics.

- **Ensure that public transport remains safe, affordable, reliable and efficient for residents,** with a clear and consistent strategy in place to minimize potential viral transmission.

Cities should identify multi-purpose and flexible buildings that can contribute to strengthening their health resilience in the face of future crises, including the possibility of further waves of COVID-19

- **Commit to a more sustainable urban future by investing in public transit and compact, accessible urban layouts that promote healthy behaviours** like cycling and walking.

Neighbourhood scale:

- **Place an increasing emphasis on neighbourhoods in city planning, with a focus on promoting self-contained and socially inclusive communities,** with the necessary services and amenities to allow residents to meet their needs locally, stay healthy and economically active.

- **Develop tools to support effective neighbourhood strategies through locally informed, granular decision making.** Cities must ensure that top-down strategies are balanced with more contextually sensitive procedures.

- **City authorities should undertake public space assessments and programmes to create more equitably distributed public spaces** that promote use by diverse group and encourage healthy lifestyles.

- **Recognize that many public spaces serve multiple functions and review local regulations to allow flexibility and adaptability of these spaces for diversity of uses,** particularly during a pandemic when public spaces must rapidly accommodate new needs.

- **Explore opportunities to retrofit existing neighbourhoods within city centres to include mixed-use spaces.** This could be achieved by changing land use or permissible activities within optimal density and infrastructure limits. For example, design spaces for pop-up stores, offices or markets within neighbourhoods to expand local services.

Building scale:

- **Ensure that adequate housing is a central part of any public health strategy,** including stipulations on minimum living space, access to light, thermal comfort and ventilation applicable in all contexts.

- **Prioritize the needs of urban residents for personal access to green spaces and outdoor areas during the pandemic.** This could include reconceptualizing outdoor areas, such as space for exercise and food production through rooftops, courtyards and balconies.

- **Strategize how to reconfigure existing building stock to adapt to new and emerging challenges** brought on by COVID-19, such as the imaginative repurposing of underused spaces, such as hotels, stadiums and museums as health and care facilities.

- **Leverage flexibility as a resource for future public health crises:** identify suitable multi-purpose buildings as part of health resilience plans, especially for vulnerable populations.
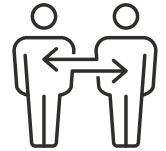
Outbreaks have been associated with the physical form of the buildings themselves: their design should be reconsidered to avoid overcrowding, provide ventilation systems and minimize potential contact between different users

Sustaining the shift towards non-motorized transport has the potential to contribute to active lifestyles that improve personal health and reduce CO_2 emissions