



**MANAGING FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**RESULTS**



# **Managing for sustainable results in development co-operation and COVID-19**

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**OECD/DAC Results Community Technical Reports**

# Managing for sustainable results in development co-operation and COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic poses the single largest short-term challenge to global development in several decades. Its short-term effects are disrupting the capacity of development co-operation to help partner countries prepare, address, and overcome this health and socio-economic threat. Recent gains in development results are at risk of being undone, and the capacity to monitor them will also be greatly affected. This policy brief<sup>1</sup> is intended to help development co-operation providers and their partners reflect on measures and options being considered by peers to maintain (or adapt) results-based approaches during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The recently approved *OECD/DAC Guiding Principles on Managing for Sustainable Development Results* offer a roadmap for the way ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> The OECD would like to extend its gratitude to the ministries and agencies that have shared inputs and data to prepare this policy brief, including the governments of Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States. We are also thankful for the inputs and commentary from various United Nations' agencies and development banks, as well as from several non-OECD governments and from CordAid. Any errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 virus poses an unprecedented, major challenge to most economies and societies. Global development faces its biggest immediate danger since the 2008 financial crisis. The top priorities have been to contain the epidemic and protect people. Reinforcing health systems and supporting global medical research to ensure appropriate care is provided to everyone infected by the virus has driven the initial thrust of international co-operation in responding to the crisis; but development co-operation will also need to find fast and effective solutions to deal with the economic and social impact on developing countries - particularly on those groups of population farthest behind, who will be disproportionately affected by the crisis.

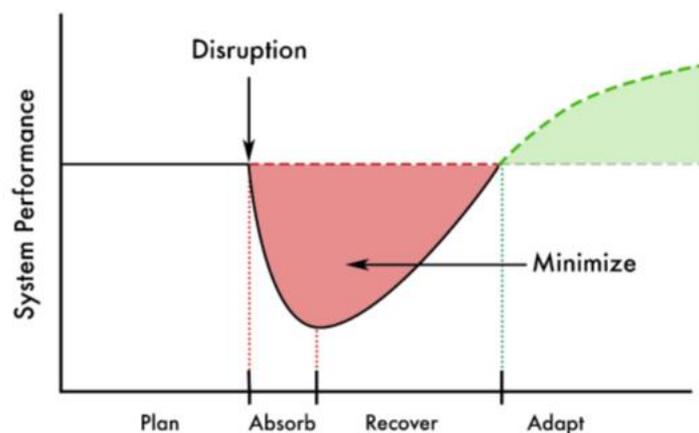
The pressure on development co-operation to show results in the response to the COVID-19 crisis will only increase with time, as donor governments face a sharp reduction in their fiscal space during the crisis aftermath. This note provides elements to reflect on how to ensure the quality and effectiveness of results-based management systems linked to development co-operation in a changing environment.

### Coping with the impacts of COVID-19: How development co-operation providers are absorbing the shock and restoring capacity

The transboundary nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the lack of preparedness of countries' health systems, and the already unprecedented social and economic costs of the crisis, calls for immediate action from the international community. Ministries and agencies in charge of development co-operation are being affected by this 'wicked' **three-pronged challenge**: while normal organisational performance is severely affected, pressure mounts to provide a meaningful international response to the crisis in support of partner countries *and* keep afloat most ongoing development co-operation activities.

Many countries have taken measures to **limit physical interaction** and have imposed travel bans or forced quarantines. Eighty-five countries have implemented some form of national or regional lockdown. These policy changes to cross-border mobility create immediate and drastic disruptions to the normal functioning of results-based management (RBM) systems used in development co-operation, which are best visualised by the figure below (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Responding to the COVID-19 impact on results-based management (RBM) systems for development co-operation**



Source: OECD (2020). [A Systemic Approach to dealing with COVID-19 and future shocks](#).

The vast majority of OECD/DAC donor countries have moved to operate in ways that limit physical interaction within their ministries, agencies and missions, as their governments introduce suppression measures to contain the pandemic. Most have introduced travel bans and switched to work from home and virtual interaction. This could potentially limit the overall organisational effectiveness of development organisations. It also creates new habits, including maximising the opportunities offered by digitalised systems supporting development work, amplifying the reach of online exchanges and events, and reducing the overall levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions produced by the development co-operation sector.

In the short term, DAC members report to be at initial stages in the preparations for a development co-operation response to COVID-19 and its aftermath and efforts are being made to ensure that it is results-oriented and monitorable. The emergency situation is exerting a 'stress test' to existing results based management systems used to provide development co-operation effectively – in particular on the **ability to adapt to the fast-evolving context, priorities and capacity shortages** in partner countries.

The pandemic is exerting programming and operational pressures, some of which clash with internal policies and organisational constraints (Figure 2 below). To become more adaptable and agile organisations, capable of responding to uncertainty effectively, development co-operation ministries and agencies will have to reconcile and neutralise these tensions, for both the short and the medium term.

### Figure 2. Effective development co-operation responses to the COVID-19 crisis will require balancing competing demands and overcoming internal constraints

Main **pressures** and **constraints** affecting the delivery of a results-oriented development co-operation response to the COVID-19 pandemic

<h4>Programming Pressures</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shifting strategic priorities</b> and <b>reprogramming funds</b> for Covid-19 response (vs planned results).</li> <li>• Conceptualising <b>standard approaches</b> to streamline Covid-19 project design (vs slower, locally-driven participatory approaches).</li> <li>• <b>Demonstrating contribution</b> ideally through clear outputs (vs outcomes).</li> </ul>	<h4>Policy Constraints</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Norms</b> regarding corporate and country-level strategic planning and reporting cycles (to be flexibilised).</li> <li>• Existing <b>guidelines on project design</b> requirements (may need a review during the crisis).</li> <li>• <b>Procurement and fiduciary regulations</b> (repurposing committed funds may require guidance).</li> </ul>
<h4>Operational Pressures</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Fast-tracking approvals</b> for Covid-19 projects (vs normal quality assurance).</li> <li>• <b>Simplifying or rescheduling results measurement and reporting.</b></li> <li>• Allowing to adopt <b>data gathering methods</b> that allow social distancing.</li> <li>• Facilitating <b>disbursements</b> of legacy and Covid-19 related portfolio despite difficult context for implementation.</li> </ul>	<h4>Organisational Constraints</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Planned schedules</b> for results measurement and reporting (members are introducing flexibility).</li> <li>• <b>Co-financing requirements</b> for implementers (members are minimising those during the crisis).</li> <li>• Drop in availability of <b>country results data</b> (even from national statistics)</li> <li>• <b>Health concerns</b> for staff/implementers.</li> </ul>

Source: Based on interviews with senior and technical officials in 20 ministries and development agencies, desk review, and data exchanges with 50 development organisations.

## Coping with COVID-19 short-term effects on results-based management systems

Within development organisations, the units in charge of strategic planning, results and monitoring, evaluation and learning are managing unavoidable short-term trade-offs posed by COVID-19 adopting similar immediate responses to the crisis (see Table 1). Potential risks and unintended consequences of the various measures will have to be mitigated or compensated for in the recovery phase to (a) avoid a negative medium-term impact on the organisational capacity to manage for results, and to (b) ensure that any new development co-operation programmes focused on addressing the pandemic and its effects are as results-oriented as they can be.

**Table 1. OECD/DAC member's immediate actions to absorb the shock**

	 COVID-19 short-term impacts	 Immediate responses to cope with the shock	 Risks to mitigate over time
More frequent >>	<b>Health risks for staff</b> (headquarters, missions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most members have adopted 'shelter-in-place' and work-from-home arrangements – incl. field staff and implementers.</li> <li>Some members opted to repatriate field staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For some members with IT systems unfit for work-from-home (see below), diminished delivery capacity will result in delays. Crisis offers opportunity for prioritising digitalisation.</li> </ul>
	<b>Health risks for implementers &amp; beneficiaries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some members are reviewing delivery approaches and expectations with implementing partners, so as to minimise their health risks while not forgetting about the welfare of development co-operation beneficiaries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid a standard response and assess on a case-by-case basis. In fast-evolving contexts, implementation arrangements may need to be adjusted frequently.</li> </ul>
	<b>Travel bans and lockdowns</b> in partner countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members still in early stages of reflecting on how to carry out planning and monitoring at country level in an unpredictable horizon.</li> <li>In some cases, the withdrawal of troops may increase safety concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As travel restrictions between countries may persist for an extended period, new and creative methods for collecting data are needed. This requires considering and carefully experimenting with various forms of remote monitoring.</li> </ul>
<< Less frequent	<b>Temporary ban</b> on planned events / workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RBM teams moving planned training and capacity building activities to online formats.</li> <li>Technical capacity building and technical assistance support severely limited.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Missed opportunities for staff learning on RBM which can be mitigated by initiatives to install capacity for future continuous remote learning on RBM as the crisis reshapes organisational culture.</li> </ul>
	<b>Need to repatriate citizens</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development co-operation staff re-deployed to temporarily support overwhelmed consular services (particularly when the development co-operation body is part of the MFA and in smaller DAC members or embassies with limited staff).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If emergency situation persists over the medium term in countries, consular services may continue crowding out development staff time, affecting the capacity to manage development co-operation and humanitarian work.</li> </ul>
	<b>IT systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For some members, corporate IT systems were not prepared for effective remote work and emergency solutions are being deployed.</li> <li>Many members report weak IT systems to support RBM.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring data and lessons from the crisis may be missed if knowledge and information management are not systematised.</li> </ul>

Source: Based on exchanges with 20 OECD/DAC development co-operation providers and close monitoring of issued guidelines.

While DAC members report to be addressing many of the negative impacts of the pandemic at operational and logistical level as described above, an array of strategic changes, policy adjustments and operational actions are also being taken to restore capacity and respond to the crisis while maintaining a reasonable level of functioning of their RBM systems (Table 2).

These measures span from strategic portfolio reviews to gear the organisation towards a response to COVID-19; time-bound readjustments in processes, requirements and deadlines to maintain a level of continuity in current programmes and activities; to opening up internal reflection periods in order to introduce substantive changes to some RBM instruments or guidance over the longer-term. The table below details some of the measures being implemented by members, with a reflection on the type of opportunities and risks that may lie ahead for each measure.

**Table 2. OECD/DAC members' on-going actions to restore capacity**

	 <b>COVID-19 short-term impacts</b>	 <b>Immediate responses</b>	 <b>Risks to mitigate over time</b>
<b>More intense &gt;&gt;</b>	<p><b>Shifting focus</b> to health systems, socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, and LNOB risks (with emphasis on emergency responses).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most members maintain their geographic focus, while reviewing country and thematic portfolios to accommodate a switch in priorities (and rising demands from partners), by:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Reviewing existing portfolios (and aid modalities) at headquarters and country levels to adjust planned interventions to respond to the pandemic and its consequences, and to compensate for lack of staff/field contractors.</li> <li>▶ Preparing policy guidance to re-adjust focus and processes.</li> <li>▶ Increasing flexibility in the use of allocated expenditure – but time-bound and within limits, such as staying within the same sector, keeping a similar intervention objective, or doubling the threshold of resources that can be reallocated in any given intervention.</li> <li>▶ Initiating the conceptualisation of dedicated thematic programmes at headquarters level to flexibly support partner countries (with a mix of existing and new resources).</li> <li>▶ Extending existing monitoring approaches for humanitarian crises to the universe of partner countries, as most countries will become <i>de facto</i> recipients of humanitarian aid (but field staff not always skilled to manage and monitor humanitarian/emergency aid and its nexus with development assistance in less fragile contexts).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programming units may be required to fast-track emergency responses. Stand ready to provide timely support to programming units from a results quality assurance perspective (e.g. through agreed principles or criteria to guide fast-tracked project design, simplified procedures, or facilitating repurposed toolkits or approaches to guide results-based intervention designs).</li> <li>• Loss of comparative advantage or sector expertise in partner countries, driven by excess focus shift towards emergency aid (crisis will affect all sectors; preserving sector expertise will help ensure better results).</li> <li>• Risk that the necessary speed of delivery prevents a careful consideration of the development-humanitarian-peace nexus approach and/or leads to higher fragmentation of bilateral aid and less reliance on joined-up multi-donor approaches.</li> </ul>
<b>&lt;&lt; Less intense</b>	<p><b>Severe disruptions in implementation and disbursement capacity</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of exceptions to the cost-sharing and reporting requirements for implementing partners (including CSOs).</li> <li>• For some members, greater emphasis on less labour intensive disbursement modalities (e.g. programme-based support, multilateralised aid).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of weak results methods, reporting, and evaluability, if exceptional measures and waivers are prolonged for a long period.</li> <li>• Lack of appropriate crisis response/ preparedness results indicators may reduce capacity to monitor or report on success and course correction – at a time where learning and accountability are crucial.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Disruptions to monitoring and reporting capacity</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding flexibility in deadlines and adjourning 'narrative'/ results reporting requirements (but not financial reporting).</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Moderate disruptions on planned RBM programme of work</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While most Results and MEL units are maintaining their annual work programme and priorities, some are slightly adjusting timeframes to allow for more in-depth thinking and focused attention to planned deliverables (e.g. new guidance, indicator frameworks, country strategies).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for continued attention to short-term needs of operational/ field staff tasked with monitoring and results reporting.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Domestic pressure over ODA budget</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While domestic pressure on existing ODA budgets has not manifested during the initial emergency phase, this is a growing concern among many members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To maintain ODA levels in the medium-term, need to set the foundations to ensure that results information on the</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expected drops in Gross National Income and public revenue suggest a negative outlook for ODA budgets in some countries.</li> </ul>	<p>contribution to fight COVID-19 in partner countries is available to be <i>used and well communicated</i>.</p>
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Source: Based on exchanges with 20 OECD/DAC development co-operation providers, online survey responses, and additional research.

How long the extraordinary measures and exceptions described above will persist are subject to the **length** and **geographic prevalence** of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the moment, we lack sufficient information to define the *duration* of the COVID-19 pandemic and its immediate impact on development co-operation systems – most analysts estimate that a vaccine could become widely available in 18 months under an optimistic scenario (September 2021). Until then, OECD countries may experience successive waves of COVID-19 outbreaks that will continue disrupting organisational performance, as governments may continue to resort to quarantining measures and travel bans. The re-introduction of suppression measures such as lockdowns may be needed in some cases. However, many developing countries may face difficulties or lack the resilience to implement such stringent social distancing measures of confinement in a sustained manner.<sup>2</sup> This could result in quasi-permanent outbreaks migrating across regions until vaccines become available in the coming months or years. Under this scenario, international travel and most forms of regular field work will likely be restricted, while programming urgencies and persistent data gaps may trump results measurement considerations at all levels for a significant period of time.

To avoid flying in the blind, development co-operation providers have to be prepared and adapt their results-based approaches to a prolonged ‘emergency’ situation, while they learn and plan for its aftermath as it happens. The formal and actual demand for data and evidence-based decision making will only increase during this COVID-19 crisis.

## Ensuring results in the next phase by adapting to the ‘new normal’

Addressing the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath in developing countries will require a substantive transformation of the ways of working in development co-operation. While OECD/DAC members are at the moment absorbing the impact of the crisis on their own organisations and introducing measures to fully recover their organisational effectiveness, for RBM managers this is a time that also offers an unique opportunity to adapt internal processes and practices, deepen some ongoing reforms, realign priorities and incentives, and invest in improving capacities and systems, including in digitalisation. This is also a time to advance solutions for more meaningful and impact-oriented use of results information, which could garner the support of leadership in the short term and become institutionalised in the medium run.

### **(a) Rely on the DAC Guiding Principles for Managing for Sustainable Development Results to identify where institutional and organisational change is most needed**

The **DAC Guiding Principles for Managing for Sustainable Development Results**<sup>3</sup> can offer a valuable frame to think about the implications of the COVID-19 crisis for RBM systems, and help DAC members self-assess how its various RBM components could be better adapted for the future. That framework builds on a wealth of lessons from two decades of experience in results-based management.

Managers can use the principles to think strategically about organisational improvement during and after the crisis. To that end, Annex 1.A proposes a series of *guiding questions* to help DAC members **observe**

<sup>2</sup> OECD (2020). [The fast changing geography of COVID-19: The poorest countries will be next and the world needs a tried and tested response protocol now](#). *Development Matters*. Accessed on 21 April 2020.

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2019). [Managing for Sustainable Development Results: OECD DAC Guiding Principles](#).

what can be learned – with a results perspective – from current events as they unfold and affect their organisations and ways of working, as well as **anticipate** what may be needed for an effective development co-operation response to the crisis and its aftermath. In fact, as part of their response to the COVID-19 crisis, various members already report to be piloting new approaches to results inspired by the Guiding Principles.

***(b) Rely on lessons learnt from past crises in designing the response to COVID-19***

As DAC members complete the process of identifying or reallocating sources of funding to expand their programme towards COVID-19-related activities, many Results and Quality Assurance units are being asked to provide support in the conceptualisation, design and monitoring of these emerging initiatives, within short timeframes and often in tension with normal internal approval processes and quality assurance procedures. A systematic look at **lessons learnt from past crises** can provide a solid foundation for well-designed development co-operation responses, as well as for alternative methods to monitoring, evaluation and learning during the crisis.<sup>4</sup>

***(c) Rely on (or develop) internal strengths to allow for adaptive management and for better risk management***

The OECD conducted a baseline survey on the status of 49-donor results-based management systems recently, just before the COVID-19 pandemic. The results suggest that most development co-operation providers have good foundations to implement the necessary changes – most donor governments and multilateral agencies meet some requirements for basic ‘adaptive’ management in order to prepare and respond flexibly to the crisis, while others could use the situation to reinforce their capacity to adapt to fast-evolving development contexts..

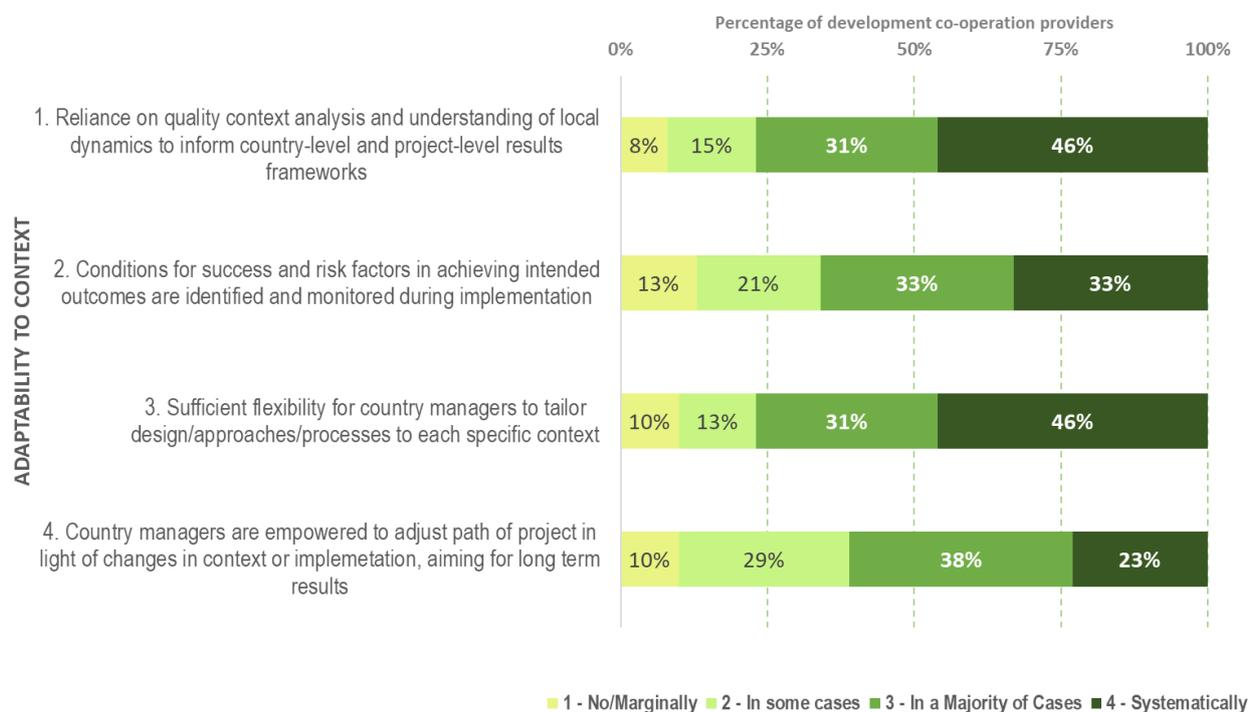
The survey results illustrated in [Figure 3](#) reinforce the point above in two ways:

- **Most providers routinely rely on quality context analysis in defining the design and results of new programmes and projects at country level.** Three-quarters of 49 assessed providers consider that most of their results frameworks and approaches are well grounded in a sound understanding of local dynamics and needs. Most also report that field staff have sufficient flexibility to adapt approaches and processes to country circumstances. The design of COVID-19 responses should build on these two strengths by actively seeking inputs from country teams and field staff, and by providing them with continued autonomy so they can tailor programme and project designs to each country context. Standardised/template approaches conceptualised from headquarters without sufficient input from the field, even if faster to process, can be counterproductive.
- **A majority of providers have adopted project management practices that identify, recognise, monitor and react to risks and changing conditions.** While not always done systematically, most providers have developed ‘good enough’ risk management practices. Most also empower field staff to adjust the path of implementation of programmes and projects in light of changing conditions. These qualities should continue to be strengthened during the response to COVID-19 and its aftermath, which is plagued with uncertainties and unplanned risks. In light of this, management practices should be iterative, with frequent check-ins, and quality assurance mechanisms –usually investing more on ensuring good project designs– should place greater emphasis on encouraging adaptive designs for the implementation phase.

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<sup>4</sup> Among other recent recom compilations of lessons, consult World Bank (2020). [Evaluative resource and evidence to inform the COVID-19 response](#); OECD/UNDP (2020). [Good practices during COVID-19](#); or USAID (2020). [Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

**Figure 3. Most development co-operation providers have sound foundations to adapt to changing contexts – development co-operation responses to COVID-19 should reinforce those practices**



Source: Managing for Sustainable Development Results: Baseline status" survey. Sample: 49 ministries and development agencies.

Yet, some members that depend on detailed results frameworks extensively may experience increased workload related to (re)designing those results frameworks, reviewing theories of change and other activities within their areas of responsibility – a consequence of the now outdated context analyses and assumptions that drove the design of these results frameworks and approaches in the first place (see Annex 1.A). Members may also need to balance trade-offs between the established priorities and targeted results in existing corporate, thematic and country level results plans and frameworks, the unpredictable nature of the crisis, and the new development challenges that will have to be addressed.

Other members, like Sweden, report that **a more strategic use of results frameworks, coupled with greater reliance on locally-defined results and theories of change, is allowing for flexibility during this emergency period.** A critical factor that enables such an approach is a **history of trust-building** with decentralised staff and implementing partners, which allows for **increased autonomy** to adapt the development interventions while relaxing other accountability-driven oversight measures.

## A one-time opportunity for institutional learning and development

The current situation presents the most significant organisational challenge for development co-operation providers in decades – but it also offers a one-time opportunity for institutional learning and development. If seized, this could be an opportunity to strengthen the adaptability muscle of our results-based management systems, to learn to overcome limitations in traditional data collection methods, and to ensure that decisions are guided by evidence in order to maximise results and impact.

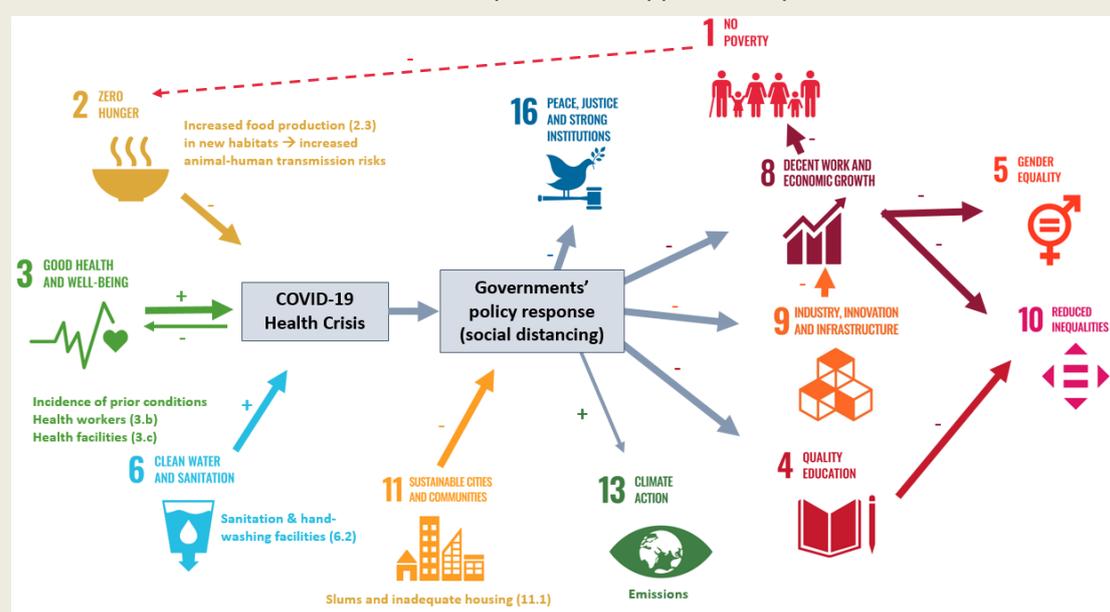
To that end, we would like to reflect on three policy-oriented recommendations:

First, the Sustainable Development Goals and their monitoring framework may enable providers to rely more on systems thinking as they approach this crisis from a results angle. The SDG framework offers a way to visualise the interconnectedness of the COVID-19 effects with other economic, social and environmental dimensions (avoiding sector silo responses) so as to help partner countries prepare **holistic responses** to the triple health/economic/social crisis unleashed by the Coronavirus (see Box 1).

As individual bilateral responses would not be sufficient to provide the scale of support that developing countries will be needing in the coming months, the SDG framework can serve as a shared set of harmonised results indicators that multiple providers use in working together in the response. Gathering 'real time' results data for evidence-based policy-making will be more crucial than ever in the coming months, and with limited national capacities, joined up monitoring approaches – involving bilateral and multilateral providers – may be the only cost-effective, realistic way to go. A harmonised approach such as the one offered by the SDG framework may help aligning all efforts in many countries.

### Box 1. The SDGs offer a harmonised, interconnected framework to monitor the effectiveness and coherence of the response to the COVID-19 crisis

As a communicable disease, COVID-19 is captured under the SDG 3.3 target. Whether providers decide to step up support to the health sector in developing countries, or to focus on the negative socio-economic impacts on the crisis, they may want to consider holistic results approaches to their development programme that explicitly recognise other interconnected factors to drive or be driven by the health crisis and countries' immediate responses to suppress its spread.



Where relevant and feasible, the use of SDG targets and indicators to inform these policy and programming responses to the crisis – in consultation with each partner country – can help harmonise measurement approaches to results, pool resources and innovative ideas to generate the necessary results data, and help in the overall division of labour and co-ordination amongst donors.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on: International Science Council (2017) *A Guide to SDG Interactions: from Science to Implementation*. <https://council.science/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/SDGs-interactions-3-healthy-lives.pdf>. Please consult the reference for a detailed description of interactions between SDG 3.3 on communicable diseases and other targets and indicators.

Secondly, **innovations in monitoring and evaluation [remote] methods can strengthen the positioning of these functions within DAC development ministries and agencies and lead to better use of results data for decision-making and learning.** Recent reflections from the evaluation community (see Box 2) anticipate a hold in their usual business which will only be overcome by innovation in [remote] methods. This will be followed by a period in which project designs may be less evaluable, monitoring data less abundant or of lower quality, and the learning function of evaluation will gain prominence vis-à-vis oversight functions. In response to this, the DAC Evalnet community is convening a critical mass to conduct a major, joined-up, real-time evaluation that can provide insights for decision-making in a timely fashion.

### Box 2. Learning from peers: How evaluation offices are coping with COVID-19

The OECD/DAC Evaluation Network convened 220 participants, largely from bilateral and multilateral evaluation offices, to exchange (remotely) on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their evaluation work.

#### **Evaluation functions are still absorbing the shock, but anticipate radical immediate changes in the way they conduct evaluations – which they hope to adopt while maintaining rigour and ethical standards**

As part of the overall results based management system, evaluation functions are affected by severe disruptions in their implementation capacity. In the context of lockdowns and travel bans, regular evaluation field work and commonly used methods (e.g. key informant interviewing, sampling, focus groups) are not possible for the foreseeable future, and remote substitutes may not be perceived as effective without the proper tools and training – prompting an intense mapping of alternative tools to complete ongoing evaluations or redesign future ones. A key concern is that most remote methods are less suited to reach those furthest behind, which will be disproportionately affected by the crisis.

At headquarters level, some countries report that evaluation functions have had to reallocate resources to advise domestic partners (as the emergency is also impacting domestically). While most are able to work remotely, for some it required front loading investments into IT systems or platforms.

#### **Concerns on the medium-term consequences on project evaluability, monitoring data and independence**

Evaluation offices worry that negative impacts on monitoring capacity, data availability and project design –while expected– will affect their capacity to perform evaluations with the usual standards (the new DAC evaluation criteria may help). Reprioritising evaluation questions was seen as an option. They also anticipated a shift in demand from policy-makers, less for evaluation and more for advice.

#### **But the crisis is also seen as an opportunity for real time, collective learning**

Building on the experience of past joint evaluations in crisis situations or for the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, most evaluation offices expressed an interest in joining a large, multi-donor evaluation of responses to COVID-19, with emphasis on real time learning and decision-making.

Source: Based on exchanges in a DAC Evalnet webinar with the participation of 280 evaluation office directors and staff (April 3, 2020).

Finally, **the need for providers to report on their contributions to development and the SDGs calls for scaling up support for alternative data gathering methods and strengthening national monitoring and statistical capacities.** Initial reflections from the community of national statistical offices and the donors that support them seem to indicate that lack of statistics and government data will be a

generalised issue across the world – even if upper middle income countries and high income countries are already exploring alternative (non-physical) methods to conduct household surveys, censuses and other forms of data gathering (Box 3). At headquarters level, RBM managers may need to anticipate a significant data gap on developing country statistics in their reporting plans –at least while the pandemic remains active across the developing world– while officials in charge of country dialogue and programming may need to consider how to scale up support for alternative data gathering methods for national statistics and data – particularly in least developed countries which run the risk of flying in the blind in terms of household surveys, health or unemployment statistics, GDP and inflation estimates, or agricultural sector data. The schedule for all those basic, regular components of national statistical systems is severely disrupted, despite their importance in responding to the health/socio-economic crisis ahead.

### **Box 3. Learning from the field: How national statistical systems in partner countries are coping with COVID-19, and medium-term implications for country-level programme monitoring**

PARIS21, an initiative to strengthen national statistical offices (NSOs) in developing countries, convened 330 participants from national statistics offices and donors in early April, to discuss how to cope with the impact of COVID-19. While Colombia, the United Kingdom, Lesotho and Maldives presented different stories in terms of capacity, the bottom line was that all NSOs are on complete hold, while demand for disaggregated data and analysis for policy-making has soared in parallel.

Responses to COVID-19 impacts range from [less effective] phone-based surveying for those with greater installed capacity, such as Colombia and the UK, to a temporary hold of all statistical operations in Maldives or Lesotho due to inability to telework or to roll out remote data gathering methods. All four cases will be affected by major data gaps and delays in publication of statistics.

Only innovations in data collection methods and selected donor support will allow for a much delayed publication of a subset of national statistics and development data during the next 12-18 months.

Source: Based on presentations and peer exchanges in a PARIS21 webinar with the participation of 335 staff from national statistical offices and development partners working on development data (April 8, 2020).

## Final reflections

- The COVID-19 pandemic has enormous ramifications for strategic planning and results-based management, and particularly for those in charge of programming, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. To address a crisis in which policy-making and action seem to be especially interested in evidence in many countries, development co-operation providers are going to have to adapt their RBM approaches at fast speed to provide timely and adequate information for decision-making and learning – albeit with significant trial-and-error in a process that is iterative by nature. Space for innovation and responsible risk taking should be encouraged.
- In that context, real-time peer learning becomes a crucial tool for contending with this crisis. The ongoing collaborative work of the OECD/DAC Results Community – through its temporary working groups associated with the guiding principles for MfSDR – is initially focusing in accompanying members as they cope with the impact of the pandemic while preparing a results-oriented response for the recovery phase. To the extent relevant to the community, that collective work will be enriched by cross-fertilisation with the parallel work done by other policy communities (evaluation, data for development, peer reviews, development financing) and donor groupings (UN, MDBs).
- The short-term impacts of the crisis on members' ability to keep their RBM systems up and running will continue to be daunting for the foreseeable future. Yet, we also need to prepare for the aftermath of the pandemic. The usual business of the results agenda will continue as a pending task – but this crisis also offers an opportunity to unlock some institutional bottlenecks, adapt norms and processes, and adopt bolder approaches to the scale of the current challenge.
- This crisis also creates momentum to foster the peace-humanitarian-development nexus, by learning and exchanging with the humanitarian sector on their processes and tools, and how a combined approach could foster the collective response to the current and future challenges.

The members of the OECD/DAC Results Community will be working to identify adequate solutions to respond to the COVID-19 impacts and to promote an effective recovery to the crisis in developing countries.

## Annex 1.A. How applying the Guiding Principles on Managing for Sustainable Development Results could help prevent, respond to, and recover from a systemic crisis?

### Illustrative examples of guiding questions triggered by the COVID-19 crisis

#### Guiding principle 1: Support sustainable development goals and desired change

- In the **short term**:
  - How to **convey the importance of development co-operation in times of crises** to help achieve social, economic and environmentally sustainable development that leaves no one behind?
  - What is the **scope for adapting the country portfolio** (e.g. re-orienting or starting new programmes), **delivery channels** (bilateral/multilateral) **and modalities**?
  - What **type of guidance** should be provided to country offices regarding the scope for **amending theories of change (ToC) and results frameworks**?
  - How to articulate the **nexus between the humanitarian response and the development co-operation response**?
  - How to **think beyond specific interventions** towards the whole system in order to understand how best to calibrate interventions?
- In the **longer term**:
  - What is needed for results frameworks and indicators to **help prevent, address and recover from crises effectively**; e.g. being less burdensome, better aligned, and covering sectors that may have been missed (including prevention and preparedness)?

#### Guiding Principle 2: Adapt to context

- How can MfSDR support the **need for an adaptive approach to planning and delivery** in a rapidly evolving situation?
- How to define a set of key measures/metrics that could be used to **identify triggers of changes to interventions**?
- What is the **scope for delivery channels, modalities and procedures** (e.g. procurement) to be adapted?
- What is the **scope for amending** theories of change and results frameworks?
- How to **set clear processes** for collecting, interpreting and acting on evidence and document these changes?
- How to balance **increased flexibility** (e.g. deadlines, procurement procedures) and **risk management**?

### Guiding Principle 3: Enhance country ownership, mutual accountability and transparency

- How to continue **promoting ownership** in a crisis?
- How to **strengthen partner country's statistical and data collection systems** to be fit for sustainable development planning and monitoring under crisis circumstances?
- How to provide **appropriate institutional capacity building** to help partners address crises?
- How to encourage and engage in **locally led innovation and problem solving**?

### Guiding Principle 4: Maximise the use of results information for learning and decision-making

- Are there decisions that must be made now, which would have benefitted from **greater data and evidence**?
- How to **identify the information of most value** to decision makers and other stakeholders across a range of interventions? Then using this to set out an agreed approach to how learning will inform different kinds of decision making.
- How to be accountable and **demonstrate the impact** of the work done by development co-operation providers to address the crisis?
- How to replicate and adapt **examples of new/innovative decision-making, information-sharing processes** that have been helpful in the domestic response to the crisis?

### Guiding Principle 5: Foster a culture of results and learning

- How to build **leadership vision** and a **supportive management culture** across the different teams and units coordinating the response to the crisis? How should **leadership communicate** the argument for changes to interventions including on: Why we need to adapt? What we need to adapt? How we should adapt?
- How to **set up an objective and transparent system of governance** that reviews evidence, steers and communicates the response?
- How to support or prepare for **real-time monitoring, evaluation and learning** of the effects of the crisis on sustainable development in partner countries?
- How to further the **collective knowledge and ability** (a) to learn about the delivery of interventions, (b) to identify whether different (or different combinations of) interventions might work better, as well as, (c) to understand the impacts of measures?
- How can the evidence base be used to **develop a strategic and operational research agenda** that prioritises and accelerates collecting and using the most useful information?

### Guiding Principle 6: Develop a results system that is manageable and reliable

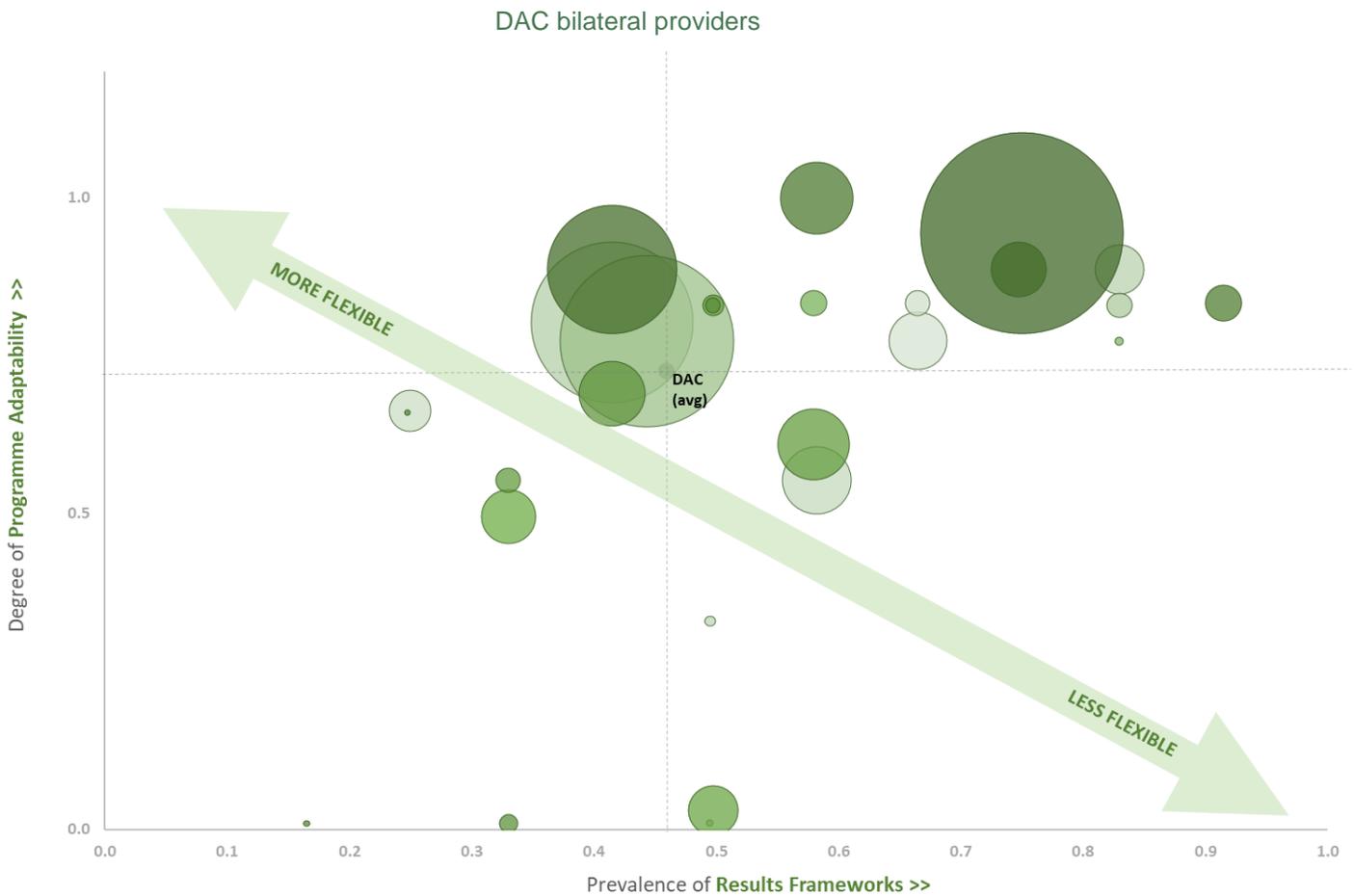
- How is the crisis affecting the **capacity to monitor, evaluate and learn** from on-going programmes? How to maintain quality monitoring and the quality standards of evaluation?
- How to balance the need to collect a range of data and evidence and the need for **'quick enough' and 'good enough' measures**, given fast changing developments and trends?

- With traditional ways of data collection affected (more desk reviews and remote methods; less monitoring on the ground and less face to-face census and evaluation interviews), how to ensure **accurate and comprehensive data** is collected? In particular: How to ensure inclusivity/**reaching out to those left behind**? What is the potential for using new IT systems and sources of data?
- How to **re-prioritise evaluations** taking a cost-benefit approach?
- How to pass the message that Monitoring and Evaluation are all the more important in terms of crisis and need to be **kept a priority**?

# Annex 1.B. Adaptive management for sustainable results: Survey results

**Annex Figure 1. Are our RBM systems ready to support a fast response to the crisis?**

Most DAC members have developed advanced results-based approaches that will enable the redesign and review of existing or pipelined programmes and projects to prepare for the COVID-19 response. Meanwhile in the short term higher prevalence of results frameworks at multiple levels may translate in a higher workload for results quality assurance staff and solicitations for adaptive management on their side. The figure below reflects the baseline status for 49 development co-operation providers.



Note: The two indices represented in this graph ('prevalence of results frameworks' and 'degree of programme adaptability') are proxies estimated on the basis of self-reported HQ and field office survey responses to the extent of use of results frameworks at various levels, and the authorising environment for adaptability during the design and implementation phases of development programmes and projects. Values are only approximate. Bubble size represents total ODA amounts disbursed in 2018.

Source: Calculations based on surveys conducted by OECD staff on DAC members' results based approaches.

## Annex 1.C. Knowledge hubs and analytical tools

Name	Short description	Link
<b>OECD Policy Hub</b>	What are the impacts and consequences of the coronavirus pandemic on lives and societies – and what are some of the solutions to boost healthcare systems, secure businesses, maintain jobs and education, and stabilise financial markets and economies?	<a href="http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/">http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/</a>
<b>OECD Country Policy Tracker</b>	What are countries doing to contain the spread of the coronavirus? How are countries helping people, small businesses and the economy to weather the crisis and beyond? This Country Policy Tracker helps you to navigate the global response.	<a href="https://oecd.github.io/OECD-covid-action-map/">https://oecd.github.io/OECD-covid-action-map/</a>
<b>Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker</b>	Governments are taking a wide range of measures in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) aims to track and compare government responses to the coronavirus outbreak worldwide rigorously and consistently.	<a href="https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/oxford-COVID-19-government-response-tracker">https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/oxford-COVID-19-government-response-tracker</a>
<b>World Bank Knowledge Hub on COVID-19</b>	Development news related to COVID-19 and project tracker on COVID-19 emergency support. Interesting to review the results frameworks used for those projects.	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are/news/coronavirus-covid19">https://www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are/news/coronavirus-covid19</a>
<b>World Bank's COVID-19 Analytical Tool</b>	This tool provides an array of real-time data, statistical indicators, and other types of data that are relevant to the coronavirus pandemic.	<a href="http://datatopics.worldbank.org/universal-health-coverage/covid19/">http://datatopics.worldbank.org/universal-health-coverage/covid19/</a>
<b>IMF COVID-19 Knowledge Hub</b>	Latest developments on the COVID-19 fiscal policy responses, per country.	<a href="https://www.imf.org/en/TOPICS/imf-and-covid19">https://www.imf.org/en/TOPICS/imf-and-covid19</a>
<b>IMF COVID-19 Policy Tracker</b>	This policy tracker summarizes the key economic responses 193 governments are taking to limit the human and economic impact of the pandemic.	<a href="https://www.imf.org/en/TOPICS/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19">https://www.imf.org/en/TOPICS/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19</a>
<b>WHO's COVID-19 Hub</b>	The most authoritative source on rolling health updates related to the COVID-19 pandemic.	<a href="https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019">https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019</a>
<b>WHO's COVID-19 dashboard</b>	Official tracker of COVID-19 statistics. Updated daily.	<a href="https://covid19.who.int/">https://covid19.who.int/</a>
<b>Worldometer's Pandemic Tracker</b>	Comprehensive dashboard on COVID-19 related statistics and trends.	<a href="https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries">https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries</a>

<b>The Lancet – COVID-19 Resource Centre</b>	Authoritative knowledge hub on the latest COVID-19 research to inform the strategies and response of health systems.	<a href="https://www.thelancet.com/coronavirus">https://www.thelancet.com/coronavirus</a>
<b>SDG Pathfinder on COVID-19</b>	Cross International Organisations platform concentrating all existing policy knowledge to tackle the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences.	<a href="https://sdg-pathfinder.org/focus/coronavirus">https://sdg-pathfinder.org/focus/coronavirus</a>
<b>United Nations' COVID-19 Hub</b>	Whole-of-UN knowledge hub and updates on COVID-19 and its consequences on sustainable development.	<a href="https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus">https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus</a>
<b>European Observatory of Health Systems and Policies COVID-19 Health System Response Monitor</b>	The Health System Response Monitor (HSRM) has been designed in response to the COVID-19 outbreak to collect and organize up-to-date information on how countries are responding to the crisis. It focuses primarily on the responses of health systems but also captures wider public health initiatives. This is a joint undertaking of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the European Commission, and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies	<a href="https://www.covid19healthsystem.org/mainpage.aspx">https://www.covid19healthsystem.org/mainpage.aspx</a>
<b>Cambridge Country Responses to the Covid19 Pandemic</b>	Blog maintained by the University of Cambridge with country-level information on responses to COVID-19 crisis.	<a href="https://www.cambridge.org/core/blog/tag/country-responses-to-the-covid19-pandemic/">https://www.cambridge.org/core/blog/tag/country-responses-to-the-covid19-pandemic/</a> <a href="https://public.tableau.com/views/COVIDFundingvisualisation/COVID-19funding?:embed=y&amp;:tooltbars=no&amp;:display_count=no&amp;:showVizHome=no">https://public.tableau.com/views/COVIDFundingvisualisation/COVID-19funding?:embed=y&amp;:tooltbars=no&amp;:display_count=no&amp;:showVizHome=no</a>
<b>DEVEX Funding the Response To COVID-19</b>	Interactive dashboard to explore where the COVID-19 funding is going, who's supplying the money, and what funding is focusing on.	<a href="https://public.tableau.com/views/COVIDFundingvisualisation/COVID-19funding?:embed=y&amp;:tooltbars=no&amp;:display_count=no&amp;:showVizHome=no">https://public.tableau.com/views/COVIDFundingvisualisation/COVID-19funding?:embed=y&amp;:tooltbars=no&amp;:display_count=no&amp;:showVizHome=no</a>
<b>Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data: COVID-19 Hub</b>	Comprehensive list of all data sources and trackers related to the various sectoral dimensions and impacts of COVID-19.	<a href="http://www.data4sdgs.org/resources/COVID-19-resources">http://www.data4sdgs.org/resources/COVID-19-resources</a>
<b>COVID-19 Innovation Map</b>	Global tracker on innovations related to the fight against COVID-19 and its effects.	<a href="https://www.startupblink.com/blog/coronavirus-innovation-map/#more-5932">https://www.startupblink.com/blog/coronavirus-innovation-map/#more-5932</a>

Non-exhaustive list of other dedicated donor hubs on COVID-19:

[USAID](#) | [UNICEF](#) | [Asian Development Bank](#)  
[African Dev. Bank](#) | [UNAIDS](#) | [Germany](#)  
[UNESCO](#) | [UNWOMEN](#) |