



Anticipatory Resilience & Preparedness for the Coronavirus and Beyond

Policy & Societal Interventions

Overview

This outlines two proposals to support resilience and preparedness for large-scale downside societal risks associated with the on-going crises and its interactions through society. If severe downside risks are avoided, it will bequeath a resilience and preparedness infrastructure and enhanced social capital, making us better able to face a medium-term future of escalating risk and uncertainty.

Background

Covid-19 is initiating an unprecedented synchronized global health and socio-economic shock. There may be multiple pandemic waves.

It is happening at a time when there were already major intensifying systemic stresses related to global indebtedness, the environment, and the decline in trust within and between countries.

There are re-enforcing and accelerating tensions between falling demand, supply-chain contagion, an unstable financial system, and our behavioural responses. This is increasingly exposing vulnerabilities within the complex web of interdependencies through which normal life is sustained.

There is growing scope for socio-economic interactions, cascading, and non-linearity and tipping points through societal systems. This will compound uncertainty and downside risk. Releasing distancing and economic restrictions is unlikely to stop the systemic shock.

Disrupted societies will be less resilient to further shocks this year and next, including from hysteresis, the unintended consequences of monetary and fiscal policy, financial crises, social and political crises, a likely global food crisis, the consequences of low oil prices, and growing climate change and biodiversity crisis influenced risk.

There is a fundamental uncertainty as to what path we are on, in addition to fundamental limits in our ability to manage or control the evolving situation. Some possible scenarios are laid out below. What is important is that there are potentially very severe risks to our society that could emerge suddenly.

We may come through this next year or two relatively well. Yet even if we do, we'd emerge even more vulnerable, while facing escalating and interacting climate and biodiversity related risk, medium term risk arising from constraints to affordable global oil production, growing potential for food and water crises, and an untenable financial system. Pandemics too, will return. This shock may just prefigure an increasingly uncertain and dangerous future.

To face such challenges head-on is an act of optimism. It expresses a faith in each other, and our shared future.

Scenario	Description	Content
High H1	Rebound	A short recession and rebound

H2	Slow Rebound	Longer recession with slow and uncertain recovery. Additional shocks to less resilient society may cause a more severe crisis.
Severe S1	Persistent recession	> 20% unemployment, widespread poverty, low adaptive capacity, increasingly vulnerable to additional stress/ shocks, repeated disrupted recovery.
S2	Depression	> 40% unemployment, critical Infrastructure disruptions, wide-spread poverty, food insecurity. Slow recovery. Additional shocks to the less resilient society may cause catastrophic crisis.
Catastrophic C1 C2	Deep Depression	Deep poverty, significant malnutrition, communicable diseases, persistent crit. Infrastructure disruption, failing systems. Irrecoverable.
	Catastrophic Failure	A Shutdown in the flow of goods and services.

Table: Downside Scenarios for our present trajectory, and what we may need to prepare for.

Approaching a Response

- We have entered a risk environment that is increasingly challenging our expectations, worldviews, analytical models, sunk costs, our societies adaption to risk, and established contingency planning. We need institutional and social infrastructures more adaptive to this changing situation.
- We need to anticipate and prepare for tomorrows potential crises by acting today. We also need to enhance society's resilience so that we are better placed to face an uncertain and turbulent future.
- Most of the attention of policymakers and citizens is focused on dealing with the immediate and near-term conditions. We need planning and preparedness infrastructure that can anticipate risk and facilitate preparedness and resilience over a range of timescales.
- Whole of Society Approach: High impact risks require citizens, communities, civil society, the public and private sector to deepen their capacities, in addition to coordinating collective responses. This requires sustained effort.
- Resilience building can give us focus and agency in a time of uncertainty, a chance to learn and invent, build new friendships and the chance to be part of a collective endeavour of great importance to everyone. Thereby supporting mental health and social cohesion in a testing time.
- It may be thought that acting on a major preparedness and resilience effort now would overwhelm an already stressed situation. We need to find a way to do this. Risk is growing, we're unprepared, and an ideal moment may never arrive.

Proposal

This briefly outlines a top-down, and a bottom-up suggestion for what is needed now. They can be initiated independently but should work together. The specific details are less important than institutionalising responses. Any such actions will take the efforts of many.

1. A National Resilience and Preparedness Agency in the program for government

The immediate set up of an organisation to address the evolving crisis and future risk. It would take the lead on country-wide preparedness and resilience building. The Swedish Contingency Agency, the MSB, provides one model for such an organisation. It would be a government agency, with an

independent board. It would complement the role of other critical government agencies, but not act as an emergency manager.

Illustrative Examples of Potential Roles:

- Undertake a review of state contingency expectations, response capacities.
- Shock planning and preparedness.
- Anticipating very high unemployment, design and manage a program for national resilience building that could harness their skills to support everybody's future.
- Anticipating the availability of major stimulus, develop a priority list for investment in resilient critical infrastructure. E.g. allowing urban water and sanitation to function, even if the grid is severely compromised, or, a national local resilience infrastructure through the *An Post* network.
- Help lead and implement a national food security strategy.
- Help curate a national conversation on societal expectations, risk, and how we respond wisely.

2. A National Network and Infrastructure for People-driven Societal Resilience

A national commonly owned organisation supporting society wide resilience building.

Illustrative Examples of Potential Roles:

- Information systems development so that every community has tools to collaborate, and coordinate resilience and preparedness.
- Support family, urban, community food security; enhancing local biodiversity; vulnerability and resource mapping; water capture etc.
- Facilitate user generated problem solving, innovation development, communications materials, video etc.
- First aid and local crisis response training (with retired/ furloughed Peacekeepers/ Disaster managers?).
- Specific programs targeted at schools, businesses, scouts, churches, sporting clubs etc.
- Funding: Now would be a time for those that can, to liquidate financial assets, and give unencumbered support to this and other efforts that focus on resilience and preparedness. Our interdependencies mean we're all in this together.

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