

Part IV: Borders, Crises, and Futures

Chapter 2

POST-PANDEMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY OUTLOOK

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic was not merely a public health crisis but also a global inflection point that exposed deep structural weaknesses and inequities across societies (Huang et al., 2022). Its disruptive impact transcends national boundaries and disciplinary silos, challenging traditional approaches to development, governance, public policy, and global cooperation. The sudden collapse of health systems, massive loss of livelihoods, disruptions in education, supply chains, and mobility, along with the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, revealed the fragility of development models overly reliant on economic growth without adequate attention to social resilience and environmental sustainability.

In the wake of the pandemic, many nations have found themselves rethinking priorities and reevaluating frameworks of progress (Bekkum, 2011). Questions about healthcare equity, digital infrastructure, mental health, informal labor protection, food security, and climate vulnerability came to the forefront. Moreover, the pandemic has revealed how interconnected disciplines such as economics, public health, technology, sociology, and environmental science are when addressing global crises. It became evident that siloed, sector-specific approaches were inadequate for facing such complex, multifaceted challenges.

As we transition to a post-pandemic era, the need for a holistic, inclusive, and interdisciplinary framework of development has become more urgent than ever (Ahuja, 2021). There is a growing consensus that “recovery” must not mean returning to the pre-pandemic status quo but reimagining development itself-emphasizing resilience, equity, and sustainability. This chapter explores these shifting paradigms and emerging priorities by adopting a multidisciplinary lens that can inform more adaptive, responsive, and just developmental pathways in the post-pandemic world. The primary purpose of this chapter is to critically examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped development priorities and highlight the necessity of adopting a multidisciplinary approach in response (Ivic, 2020). The pandemic has acted as a stress test for global systems, making it clear that isolated policy solutions or sector-specific strategies are insufficient in addressing complex and interdependent challenges. As the world grapples with the aftermath, there is an urgent need

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to reframe development not only in economic terms but also as a dynamic interplay of health, environment, governance, technology, education, and social justice. This chapter aims to explore emerging post-pandemic priorities, such as universal healthcare, digital inclusion, climate adaptation, decentralized governance, and mental health, as central pillars of development (Martin et al., 2018). By integrating insights from disciplines such as public health, economics, environmental studies, and sociology, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how development can be made more resilient and inclusive.

Furthermore, this chapter offers a critical reflection on how future development policies can avoid past mistakes by being better prepared for systemic shocks. It advocates for integrated, cross-sectoral approaches to policymaking informed by local contexts and global solidarities, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and sustainable post-pandemic world.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The concept of "post-pandemic development priorities" refers to the strategic reorientation of development goals, practices, and policies in response to multifaceted disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Madaan et al., 2023). These priorities emerge from an urgent recognition that the pandemic was not merely a health crisis but a systemic shock that exposed and exacerbated existing socioeconomic, political, and environmental inequalities across the globe. At its core, the term denotes an effort to realign development trajectories with resilience, inclusivity, sustainability, and justice.

The origin of this concept lies in the broader historical evolution of developmental thinking (Lusiandari & Pandin, 2021). The post-World War II period saw development as an economic project focused on industrialization and GDP growth. However, the 1980s and the 1990s brought a human development perspective emphasizing health, education, and well-being, primarily through the work of Amartya Sen and the Human Development Reports by UNDP. The pandemic has now catalyzed a third wave: a multidisciplinary outlook that integrates public health infrastructure, digital inclusion, ecological sustainability, social protection, and governance reform. The phrase 'post-pandemic' itself implies a break or rupture in previous paradigms, calling for reimagining priorities in light of new vulnerabilities and capabilities (Thürer et al., 2014). From the Global North to the Global South, the pandemic has made it evident that development cannot be pursued in silos. The idea of development as a linear process has been destabilized, necessitating a more integrated and reflexive approach.

In this context, post-pandemic development priorities are not just about recovery but also about the transformation of systems, institutions, and mindsets (Guerra & Syed, 2023). They encompass a spectrum of concerns, including redefining economic resilience and the future of work to address mental health, educational equity, and climate adaptation. These priorities vary across disciplines—public health, economics, political science, technology, and environmental studies—yet converge on the need for structural change and greater preparedness for future shocks. The evolution of post-pandemic development priorities is marked by several stages, each shaped by global experience, interdisciplinary engagement, and empirical lessons learned from COVID-19 (Symvoulakis et al., 2020). Initially, the discourse was dominated by immediate emergency responses, such as curbing infections, vaccine rollout, and economic stimulus. Governments and multilateral institutions have

focused on damage control, emphasizing public health capacity, social safety nets, and supply chain resilience.

However, as the world moved from crisis management to recovery, the limitations of pre-pandemic development models have become starkly visible (Bhat & Saba, 2025). For example, countries with high GDPs but weak public health systems (such as the U.S. and parts of Europe) suffered severely, whereas some low- and middle-income countries with robust community health frameworks fared better. This challenged the long-held assumptions that development progress is equated with economic growth alone.

Gradually, the narrative began to shift toward building long-term resilience (Aruvali et al., 2024). Scholars, policymakers, and civil society actors called for a "build back better" agenda-one that not only restored pre-pandemic conditions but also corrected the systemic flaws that the pandemic had exposed. This included rethinking labor markets, care economies, urban planning, data governance, and global solidarity. This evolution also witnessed the integration of new thematic pillars (Li et al., 2023). Digital inclusion has emerged as a critical concern, as remote work, online education, and e-health have become central to everyday life. Similarly, climate resilience has gained prominence given the interconnectedness between ecological degradation and zoonotic diseases. The concept of intersectionality-understanding how race, class, gender, and geography compound vulnerability-also influenced developmental thinking, pushing for more nuanced and justice-oriented strategies.

Multilateral bodies such as the United Nations, World Bank, and WHO began to revise their frameworks, calling for pandemic-proof development (Natenson, 2015). This included proposing global public goods (e.g., vaccines and health data), universal health coverage, and climate-smart infrastructure. At the same time, grassroots movements and indigenous communities have advocated for localized development paradigms, prioritizing sustainability, autonomy, and cultural sensitivity. Thus, post-pandemic development priorities have evolved from reactive strategies to proactive blueprints that emphasize adaptability, inclusiveness, and interdependence. They represent a convergence of crisis-induced urgency and long-standing critiques of mainstream development models, aiming not merely for economic recovery but also for a holistic reimagining of what it means to thrive in a complex, uncertain world. Understanding post-pandemic development priorities requires clarifying how this concept relates to and differs from other key ideas in the development discourse.

One closely related concept is 'resilient development,' a framework focused on enabling individuals, communities, and systems to anticipate, absorb, and recover from shocks (Kaplan-Hallam et al., 2018). While resilience is a core goal of post-pandemic development, the latter includes broader structural reforms and interdisciplinary engagement, going beyond mere capacity-building to address systemic inequalities. Another overlapping idea is "sustainable development," popularized by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Antonucci, 2019). Both frameworks emphasize long-term planning, equity, and environmental stewardship. However, post-pandemic priorities place greater emphasis on health security, digital access, and crisis readiness, areas that were underplayed in the original SDG matrix. This shift reflects the need to revise global development commitments in light of emerging vulnerabilities.

The idea of “recovery planning” is distinct from the current outlook (Gustin, 2020). Recovery typically implies a return to a previous state, whereas post-pandemic development advocates a transformation—one that does not revert to old norms, but redefines them. Similarly, disaster risk reduction (DRR) focuses on preparing for and mitigating specific hazards but often lacks the socio-political depth of post-pandemic discourse, which questions who benefits from existing systems and why certain groups remain more vulnerable.

Moreover, digital transformation, although often treated as a separate technological trend, is central to post-pandemic priorities. However, the latter critically examines uneven access to digital infrastructure and literacy, recognizing digital exclusion as a new axis of inequality. In contrast to economic recovery packages, which tend to favor short-term stimuli and macroeconomic indicators, post-pandemic development stresses inclusive governance, participatory policy-making, and ethical frameworks that foreground care, justice, and well-being (Pavolová et al., 2019). In summary, while related to a range of development approaches, post-pandemic development priorities are uniquely distinguished by their holistic, future-oriented, and interdisciplinary nature. They challenge us to rethink development not as a technical exercise but as a deeply political and ethical undertaking in an increasingly interdependent world.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a systemic shock that exposed the limitations of existing development paradigms while simultaneously prompting a re-evaluation of theoretical approaches to development (Latief et al., 2023). Post-pandemic development priorities require a multidisciplinary framework grounded in theories that emphasize resilience, equity, and sustainability. One foundational approach is Sen’s Capability Approach, which shifts the focus from economic growth to the actual freedoms individuals have to live the lives they value (Rajapakse, 2016). This framework is particularly relevant in a post-pandemic world, where vulnerabilities in health, education, and social security have become starkly visible. The capability approach urges policymakers to consider multidimensional well-being over narrow GDP-based metrics and underlines the importance of expanding substantive freedoms and public infrastructure to enhance people’s capabilities in times of crises.

Sustainable Development Theory, as outlined in the Brundtland Report (1987), also underpins post-pandemic thinking (Bermejo, 2014). It advocates meeting the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The pandemic has illuminated how unsustainable environmental practices and global inequality have exacerbated the impact of global health crises. Consequently, priorities have shifted towards circular economies, renewable energy, and ecological stewardship as central tenets of future development. The Human Security Framework, developed by the UNDP, complements these perspectives by redefining security through a development lens, emphasizing economic, health, environmental, personal, and political security (Clott, 2017). The pandemic demonstrated that traditional notions of security centered on military strength were inadequate. Pandemics, climate change, and economic precarity have proven to be immediate threats that necessitate human-centric, preventive, and inclusive policy responses.

From a macroeconomic standpoint, Keynesian economic theory has regained prominence, particularly in the context of massive state interventions during and after the pandemic (Marshall

& Rochon, 2019). Keynesianism supports the role of the state in stimulating demand, supporting employment, and stabilizing economic cycles through fiscal policies—principles that many governments have relied on to cushion the economic fallout of COVID-19. This has reignited debates on welfare-state expansion, universal basic income (UBI), and public healthcare investment.

Finally, intersectionality theory, emerging from feminist and critical race studies, provides a vital lens for understanding how overlapping social identities (such as race, gender, class, and caste) amplify vulnerability during crises. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected women, minorities, informal workers, and marginalized communities (Nelson et al., 2017). Thus, an intersectional analysis is crucial for framing equitable development priorities that do not reproduce or deepen the existing inequalities. Together, these core theories advocate for a redefinition of development as not merely economic progress but as a comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable process of improving human well-being. Post-pandemic development discourse is shaped not only by supportive theories, but also by debates among competing or complementary paradigms (Sadeghpour & D'Angelo, 2022). Rather than undermining the field, these tensions enrich its multidisciplinary and adaptability.

One major point of contention lies between neoliberalism and state-led development models (Toft, 2021). Neoliberalism, which has been dominant since the 1980s, has promoted minimal government intervention, free markets, deregulation, and privatization. While it led to economic integration and global growth, the pandemic exposed its fragility, especially in healthcare systems weakened by austerity and privatization. In contrast, state-led models rooted in Keynesian and welfare economics gained renewed relevance. Countries with robust public health systems and welfare programs (e.g., Scandinavian states) fared better, challenging neoliberal orthodoxy. Modernization and dependency theories present another tension (Kay, 2018). Modernization theory posits a linear progression from traditional to modern societies, often through Western models of industrialization and urbanization. However, the pandemic disrupted global supply chains and highlighted the risk of overdependence on global systems. Dependency theorists argue that structural imbalances between the Global North and the South perpetuate underdevelopment. The crisis amplified calls for local self-reliance, regional resilience, and economic decolonization.

There are also debates between the technocratic and participatory approaches (Benoit, 2016). Technocratic development emphasizes data-driven, expert-led policymaking, which is central during the pandemic (e.g., epidemiological modeling and vaccine distribution). However, critics have argued that such approaches can be top-down and exclusionary. Participatory approaches, influenced by Paulo Freire and grassroots movements, advocate community engagement, local knowledge, and democratic decision-making. Both models have their place, but post-pandemic frameworks increasingly recognize the need to balance expert knowledge with local agencies. Similarly, growth-oriented versus degrowth or post-growth theories present divergent futures (Dengler, 2021). While some advocate a return to economic growth to recover pandemic losses, others argue that endless growth is ecologically unsustainable. Degrowth theorists propose alternative well-being indicators (e.g., Gross National Happiness, Human Development Index) and emphasize quality of life, care work, and ecological balance over consumerism and GDP.

Finally, Western-centric development models face criticism from decolonial and indigenous perspectives, which call for knowledge pluralism and culturally specific pathways (Hoelting et al., 2024). Indigenous worldviews, with an emphasis on harmony with nature, collective responsibility, and intergenerational wisdom, are being integrated into sustainability discourses, especially in Latin America, Africa, and South Asia. These competing and complementary theories reveal that post-pandemic development cannot rely on a singular framework; instead, it must engage critically with diverse paradigms to forge resilient and just futures. In this chapter, the primary theoretical lens draws upon a hybrid framework integrating the Capability Approach, Human Security, and Sustainability theories, complemented by intersectionality and Keynesian economics (Rochon, 2023). This interdisciplinary blend is justified both on normative and pragmatic grounds.

Normally, these theories shift the focus of development from economic growth alone to human-centered well-being, social justice, and ecological responsibility (El Alaoui, 2019). The Capability Approach ensures that development is evaluated based on people's freedom and opportunities. Human Security reorients priorities toward preventing systemic vulnerabilities such as pandemics and climate disasters. The sustainability theory adds the critical dimension of environmental stewardship, which is essential in the wake of zoonotic diseases linked to ecological degradation. Pragmatically, the pandemic has revealed that resilience, equity, and inclusivity are prerequisites for durable development (Mihalopoulos, 2022). These lenses are equipped to diagnose structural inequalities and propose transformative responses that account for the complex interlinked challenges of the 21st century. They enable a system-level understanding of development that goes beyond short-term fixes to address long-term risks and root causes.

Intersectionality ensures that the framework is sensitive to diversity and injustice, recognizing that policies that ignore gender, caste, or racial dimensions often fail or worsen outcomes (Kroes et al., 2024). Keynesian economics provides the fiscal and policy tools necessary to support large-scale recovery, social safety nets, and public investment in essential services, such as health and education. Together, these theories offer a plural, inclusive, and context-sensitive foundation for redefining developmental priorities in the post-pandemic world. Rather than choosing a single discipline or framework, this chapter advocates strategic synthesis to guide effective, equitable, and sustainable development.

DEBATES, GAPS, AND THEORETICAL CHALLENGES

The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed a reassessment of development paradigms across disciplines, but it has also deepened existing tensions and raised new controversies (Gavin et al., 2020). A core debate centers on the balance between economic growth and social welfare. Neoliberal models prioritize market efficiency and GDP recovery, often at the expense of inequality and social vulnerability. Critics argue that such approaches exacerbate structural disparities, particularly in health, education, and informal labor markets, sectors exposed as fragile during the pandemic. Others maintain that rapid economic revival through liberalized markets is essential for stabilizing economies and generating employment.

Another significant tension exists between state-led and community-based approaches to development (Hayden & Wai, 2013). While many nations saw a resurgence in state intervention during the pandemic (in health systems, welfare schemes, and emergency governance), grassroots

organizations and local communities often proved more agile in delivering aid and support. This has revived debates on the scale and scope of decentralization, participatory governance, and subsidiarity principle. Environmental concerns have also come to the forefront, creating a divide between green recovery agendas and traditional fossil-fuelled development pathways (Gao & Zheng, 2017). While international calls for a "just transition" and climate-resilient development have intensified, political and economic pressures in many low- and middle-income countries have pushed toward a return to carbon-intensive growth models. This raises ethical and geopolitical questions regarding climate justice, carbon equity, and intergenerational responsibility.

Finally, the question of global solidarity versus vaccine nationalism has exposed the fragility of multilateralism (Fairweather, 2021). Debates continue to have equitable access to vaccines, intellectual property rights (e.g., TRIPS waivers), and the responsibilities of Global North actors in aiding Global South recovery efforts. Thus, the pandemic reopened old tensions between cosmopolitan ideals and national interest-driven policies, reconfiguring the ethics of global development cooperation. These controversies point to an unresolved conflict between short-term crisis management and long-term structural transformation, forcing scholars and practitioners alike to grapple with competing visions of what development should look like in a post-pandemic world.

Several critical frameworks have emerged to interrogate dominant developmental responses to pandemics (Li et al., 2023). One influential approach comes from postcolonial and decolonial scholars who argue that pandemic recovery narratives reproduce colonial hierarchies and global dependencies. These critiques emphasize how development aid, public health interventions, and economic stimulus packages are often embedded in paternalistic logic, privileging northern expertise, and marginalizing local knowledge systems. Feminist and intersectional critiques have similarly challenged the gender-neutral assumptions embedded in mainstream recovery plans (Fox, 2023). The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women, particularly in terms of unpaid care work, domestic violence, and labor force exits, has highlighted the invisibility of gendered experiences. Feminist political economists call for rethinking development priorities around care infrastructure, bodily autonomy, and redistribution of both productive and reproductive labor.

Environmental justice movements have also questioned the "build back better" rhetoric that accompanies green recovery agendas (Suharko, 2020). Critics warn that many green policies risk becoming tools of eco-modernization or "greenwashing," failing to address the deeper extractivist logic that underpins the global development system. For example, expanding the renewable energy infrastructure without addressing land rights or indigenous sovereignty can replicate exploitative patterns under a new guise. Another powerful lens is offered by disability rights and critical health studies, which scrutinize the medicalization of vulnerability and technocratic framing of pandemic preparedness (Ferreira et al., 2023). These perspectives call for a shift from biosecurity paradigms to care-based public health systems that prioritize accessibility, dignity, and community resilience.

Critical development theorists further question the assumption that resilience, digitalization, and innovation are inherently positive (Utami & Ramadhani, 2025). They argued that such concepts often function as ideological tools, deflecting attention from structural reforms. For instance, digital development agendas, while promising inclusion, often reproduce digital divides along the class, caste, race, and gender lines.

Together, these critical perspectives compel us to rethink not just how we recover from the pandemic but whose voices, bodies, and lifeworlds are included in the imagination of recovery (Moses, 2016). They underline that development is not merely a technical project of rebuilding, but a deeply political, contested terrain that must be radically democratized. Despite a growing body of research on COVID-19 and its development, several critical gaps persist in scholarly and policy literature. First, much of the existing research remains discipline-bound, with insufficient integration across economics, sociology, public health, environmental science, and political theories. As a result, a holistic understanding of post-pandemic recovery, particularly those that link ecological sustainability with social justice, is still emergent.

The second gap lies in the geographical and epistemic concentration of knowledge production (Candiotto, 2023). The most widely cited recovery frameworks and policy solutions originate from Global North institutions, with limited incorporation of insights from the African, Latin American, and South Asian contexts. Moreover, Indigenous and non-Western epistemologies remain largely absent from mainstream development discourse despite their relevance in imagining alternative futures rooted in community resilience, relational well-being, and ecological harmony. There is also a paucity of longitudinal and comparative studies examining the medium- and long-term impacts of pandemic-related interventions (Martin, 2017). For instance, while there is extensive literature on vaccine distribution and lockdown effects, few studies have traced how different models of social protection, urban planning, and digital infrastructure have fared over time and across contexts.

In the policy realm, youth perspectives and intergenerational justice are underexplored (Bach, 2014). Young people have borne the brunt of pandemic-related disruptions, especially in education and employment, but their voices are largely missing in strategic development planning. Similarly, the impacts of recovery policies on future generations in terms of debt sustainability and ecological footprints have received scant attention. Lastly, the literature tends to treat development as a return to a pre-pandemic “normal,” rather than an opportunity to radically reimagine social contracts, economic systems, and institutional architectures (Power, 2014). This gap calls for more normative and imaginative scholarship that moves beyond recovery to envision transformative pathways that align with equity, dignity, and planetary well-being. Addressing these gaps requires interdisciplinary collaboration, epistemic pluralism, and a commitment to inclusion, not only in what we study but also in how and with whom we produce knowledge about development in a post-pandemic world.

APPLICATION OR ILLUSTRATION

The Indian state of Kerala offers a compelling case of how a region can leverage a multidisciplinary development strategy during and after a global crisis (Ajithgopi et al., 2021). With a high Human Development Index, robust public health infrastructure, and strong traditions of grassroots governance, Kerala was uniquely positioned to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and realign its developmental priorities in a more sustainable and inclusive direction.

When the pandemic struck, Kerala's initial response was swift and coordinated (Kumar, 2022). It implemented a community-based health surveillance system integrating local governance (Panchayats), accredited social health activists (ASHAs), and civil society. This model rests on

decentralized governance and multi-sectoral coordination, combining public health, digital infrastructure, and food security measures. The state ensured that not just COVID-19 management but also wider issues of livelihood, education, mental health, and migrant welfare were addressed.

For instance, the Kudumbashree mission, a women-led self-help group network, plays a key role in delivering food, masks, and awareness of rural and urban populations (Shinde & Jeevannavar, 2023). Kerala expanded its digital learning infrastructure when schools closed, launching Bell's online education program. The state also provided psychological support hotlines, reflecting the rare acknowledgement of mental health as a development priority. Post-pandemic, Kerala used this momentum to initiate a Green Recovery Plan that linked climate resilience with employment generation (Vishnu et al., 2025). Investment in local food systems, renewable energy, and public healthcare infrastructure has increased. The People's Plan Campaign 2.0, which emphasizes participatory budgeting and inclusive planning, was reactivated to ensure that recovery efforts were democratically informed.

The Kerala case illustrates how inter-sectoral planning, social capital, and adaptive governance can effectively translate crisis management into long-term development gains (Chai & Zeng, 2018). More importantly, this shows that post-pandemic development cannot return to the pre-COVID status quo. Rather, it must incorporate health resilience, gender equity, digital inclusion, and ecological sustainability as central, not peripheral, pillars. This multidisciplinary approach is also visible in Kerala's attempt to diversify economic planning (Sorg & Groos, 2024). For example, recognizing the fragility of global remittance-based income and tourism, the government has begun to promote knowledge-based industries and local entrepreneurship in IT, biotechnology, and healthcare innovation.

The Kerala scenario has some limitations. Fiscal constraints, political contestations, and bureaucratic bottlenecks persist. However, it provides a replicable model for other regions seeking to embed resilience and equity into their development paradigms, especially in the Global South (Thinh, 2025). The Kerala example foregrounds the need to move beyond linear economic development models (Katikireddi et al., 2013). Traditional theories that emphasize GDP growth, industrial expansion, and urbanization often overlook the systemic vulnerabilities of pandemics such as weak health systems, social inequality, and ecological fragility. Therefore, a post-pandemic development paradigm must integrate insights from multiple disciplines, including public health, political science, environmental studies, economics, sociology, and digital governance.

Amartya Sen's capability approach offers a valuable lens here (Garcés Velástegui, 2020). Kerala's response prioritized human capabilities - access to health, education, public information, and social security - over mere income metrics. This shift aligns with the idea that development is freedom, and freedom is both the means and the end of development. Moreover, the pandemic underscored the relevance of resilience theory from environmental and systems perspectives. Development plans must now account for shocks, not as aberrations, but likely and recurrent. This means building adaptive capacity in institutions, technologies, and social networks.

From a governance perspective, the concept of network governance is crucial (O'Connor & Shahwan, 2025). Kerala's ability to coordinate across actors - government, NGOs, women's

collectives, health workers, and technologists - exemplifies a model where horizontal collaboration and local empowerment outperform top-down, siloed approaches. Additionally, postcolonial development theory reminds us that development models must be context-sensitive. Kerala's locally embedded strategies challenge the idea of universal 'best practices' by emphasizing local knowledge systems, public trust, and institutional memory. In summary, the pandemic invites us to rethink development through a multidisciplinary, pluralistic, and justice-oriented framework. This reveals that sustainable futures depend not only on innovation or investment but also on social solidarity, inclusive institutions, and ecological balance.

CONTRIBUTION AND INNOVATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a global stress test, exposing the vulnerabilities and contradictions embedded within prevailing development paradigms (Opolska, 2021). This chapter offers a new perspective by arguing that development, traditionally dominated by economic growth indicators and market-led reforms, must be recalibrated through a multidisciplinary lens that prioritizes resilience, equity, and sustainability. The pandemic laid bare how fragmented policy approaches-focused narrowly on GDP or sectoral efficiency- failed to address the interconnected crises of public health, education, climate, and social inequality. Hence, development must be reimaged as an integrated, people-centered process rooted in systemic thinking.

A key insight advanced in this chapter is that interdisciplinary frameworks-blending insights from public health, environmental studies, digital technology, gender studies, and political science-are no longer optional but essential (Fafard et al., 2022). For example, the failure of public health systems cannot be understood in isolation from economic precarity, labor conditions, and governance mechanisms. Similarly, the rise of digital learning solutions and telemedicine highlights the importance of digital inclusion as a foundational developmental concern, linking infrastructure with social justice. Another crucial contribution is the challenge of linear and hierarchical models of development (Scharpf, 2017). The pandemic illuminated how local knowledge systems, community networks, and informal institutions played indispensable roles in crisis response. This recognition pushes us to decolonize developmental thinking, recognizing that alternative epistemologies, especially from the Global South, offer innovative pathways to resilience and recovery.

By combining these threads, this chapter positions well-being, adaptability, and institutional trust as core developmental goals (Glatz & Schwerdtfeger, 2022). It calls for a post-pandemic shift from "catching up" with industrialized nations to "leaping forward" through locally grounded, context-specific strategies that can navigate uncertainty, complexity, and interdependence.

This chapter proposes a threefold reorientation of development priorities in the post-pandemic era.

1. From Growth to Resilience: Development strategies must shift their focus from maximizing economic output to building resilient systems, especially in health, education, food security, and climate governance. Resilience here is not simply the ability to "bounce back" but to transform institutions and infrastructure to anticipate and adapt to systemic shocks.

2. From Sectors to Systems: Traditional siloed development approaches are insufficient. A systems thinking paradigm that integrates health with the environment, education with digital access, and livelihoods with social protection is critical. This involves rethinking institutional design and policy formulation through a multi-sectoral and cross-disciplinary lens.
3. From Global Models to Local Innovation: The pandemic has demonstrated the effectiveness of community-based responses, decentralized governance, and indigenous practices. Therefore, development must embrace bottom-up innovations and plural knowledge systems rather than merely replicating Western-centric blueprints.

This synthesis contributes to broader development discourse by offering a flexible, inclusive, and future-oriented framework that recognizes vulnerability as an epistemic resource and interdependence as a moral imperative (Jagannathan & Packirisamy, 2021). This urges scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to move beyond recovery toward regeneration, guided by the principles of care, justice, and planetary health. The proposition is clear: post-pandemic development must not aim to return to a flawed normal but rather to invent new normals grounded in solidarity, sustainability, and structural transformation.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted conventional development paradigms and illuminated critical gaps in the theoretical frameworks that guide our understanding of growth, resilience, and equity (Gonzalez et al., 2021). Traditionally, development theory has focused heavily on economic indicators, such as GDP, employment rates, and trade flows. However, the pandemic has revealed the inadequacy of these measures in capturing the full scope of human well-being and social vulnerability. This moment calls for rethinking development as a multidimensional process encompassing health security, ecological sustainability, social cohesion, and digital equity.

From a theoretical perspective, the pandemic reinforces the need for intersectional and system-based approaches in development studies (Thompson, 2021). This strengthens the argument that structural inequalities, related to race, gender, caste, class, and geography, are central to understanding developmental outcomes. It also necessitates the integration of public health frameworks into development theory, recognizing health as both a determinant and consequence of development. Furthermore, the crisis has accelerated discussions around Anthropocene and post-humanist thought, emphasizing the entanglement of human, technological, and ecological systems (Vermeulen, 2020). Theoretical approaches must now account for nonlinear risks, uncertainty, and interdependence, which are concepts central to the complexity theory. Finally, the pandemic has revitalized the discourse on the role of the state, shifting attention from market-driven development to state capacity, welfare infrastructure, and decentralized governance.

In essence, the post-pandemic development theory must evolve to become more holistic, reflexive, and ethically grounded. It should recognize the co-constitutive nature of crisis and change and foreground resilience, justice, and adaptability as foundational principles. The pandemic has opened several avenues for future research in developmental studies (Mumtaz, 2022). First, there is a pressing need for empirical studies that evaluate the long-term impact of pandemic-related policy interventions such as direct cash transfers, digital education, and telemedicine on

marginalized communities. Comparative studies across different governance models can yield insights into institutional arrangements that best support equitable recovery.

Second, interdisciplinary research is required to examine the nexus among public health, environmental degradation, and economic systems. This includes exploring the impact of zoonotic diseases on global supply chains and labor migration as well as the effectiveness of "green recovery" strategies. Third, there is scope for an in-depth analysis of digital inclusion, especially with regard to access, literacy, and algorithmic bias in welfare delivery. Additionally, participatory research methods can be employed to document grassroots resilience and local innovation during crises. Finally, theoretical work is needed to revisit core development concepts such as sovereignty, citizenship, and social contracts through the lens of the pandemic. These inquiries can help formulate more just and inclusive models for future developments.

In practical terms, the insights from this chapter highlight the importance of adopting integrated policy frameworks that bridge health, technology, the environment, and economic planning. Policymakers must prioritize decentralized governance, universal basic services, and inclusive and resilient social safety nets (Coote, 2020). For development practitioners, the pandemic underscores the value of community-based approaches and participatory planning, which have proved effective in crisis response. Moreover, international development organizations should rethink project design and evaluation criteria to include resilience, adaptability, and care infrastructure metrics. Investments in digital infrastructure must be coupled with digital literacy and equity measures to avoid deepening the existing divide. Ultimately, practice must shift from reactive to anticipatory governance rooted in ethical, inclusive, and sustainable principles.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as an unprecedented global rupture that has exposed deep structural vulnerabilities within our development paradigms (Pinto & Figueiredo, 2023). This chapter examines how a multidisciplinary approach is essential for rethinking development priorities in the post-pandemic era. This underscored that traditional, sector-specific solutions are no longer sufficient to address the interlinked crises of health, inequality, climate change, economic fragility, and governance failures.

A core argument of this chapter is that development in the post-pandemic world must be rooted in resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability (Cho, 2024). Health systems must be treated as integral to economic and social planning rather than isolated sectors. The crisis made it clear that public health is not merely a medical concern, but a developmental one that requires investment in infrastructure, human resources, and social safety nets. Similarly, education, digital inclusion, and livelihood generation must be restructured with equity and access at the center. Another key contribution of this chapter lies in advocating for the dismantling of siloed disciplinary thinking (Sotnikova, 2022). Public health cannot be delinked from environmental degradation, as economic recovery cannot ignore social justice or digital inequality. The pandemic revealed the interconnectedness of these systems and thus demanded holistic policy frameworks that integrate the insights of economics, sociology, political science, environmental studies, gender studies, and technology.

Furthermore, the chapter emphasized the importance of local governance, community participation, and the agency of marginalized voices in shaping development strategies. Centralized top-down responses are often faltered, whereas localized context-sensitive approaches show resilience and adaptability (Waheduzzaman & As-Saber, 2015). Post-pandemic development must, therefore, be participatory and democratic, ensuring that policies are not just about people but made with them.

Finally, the chapter calls for a shift in the global development discourse from growth-centric metrics to those focused on human well-being, ecological balance, and structural justice. The pandemic was not just a health emergency but also a systemic crisis. Recovery should not mean a return to the status quo but a bold transformation of institutions, knowledge systems, and governance mechanisms. In summary, a multidisciplinary outlook offers not only a richer understanding of the complex challenges posed by the pandemic, but also a more robust roadmap for navigating future uncertainties. If development is to be truly transformative in the 21st century, it must break disciplinary boundaries, center human and ecological well-being, and foster structural changes grounded in justice and equity.

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