

Finnish Development Policy Committee  
Analysis

# Coronavirus threatens to erode

**A f r i c a ' s**

d e l o p m e n t e f f o r t s



Development Policy Committee

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## Coronavirus hits the most vulnerable people hardest and may increase the need for humanitarian assistance to a record level.

**T**he world cannot afford a situation in which the development efforts of African countries turn into a humanitarian crisis. The virus knows no borders so the epidemic must be controlled everywhere. Coronavirus hits the most vulnerable people hardest and may raise the need for humanitarian assistance to a record level. Finland must also prepare for this.

However, a lot can be saved through anticipation. Finland should immediately adopt a cross-sectoral approach to the corona crisis, combining humanitarian assistance and development cooperation especially to support the capability of poor countries to prepare for and respond to the epidemic and recover from it. It is important to also include peacebuilding aimed at preventing and resolving conflicts in this work.

Coronavirus makes the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more difficult for many African countries. However, it also provides opportunities to build a future that can better withstand catastrophes once the epidemic has subsided. In spite of the acute crisis, Finland has must adhere to the long-term and systematic approach it has been developing in its development policy over the past few years. In the middle of the crisis, we must not forget the importance of addressing the root causes of the problems. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets the direction and goals for this work.

Time is not on Africa's side  
– the coronavirus epidemic is  
spreading ominously to new areas

The global coronavirus pandemic is spreading in Africa. The number of infections and the extent of their incidence have increased alarmingly in the past few weeks. The highest number of infections has so far been reported

in the Republic of South Africa, in North Africa and in the West African countries. However, infections have also been reported in the East African countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, which have been Finland's long-term development cooperation partners. According to the preliminary assessments made by the World Health Organization WHO, coronavirus has spread to more than 50 fragile or conflict-affected countries<sup>1</sup>, most of which are located in Africa – and the spread continues.<sup>2</sup> Even before the coronavirus epidemic, more than 100 million people living in these countries depended on emergency aid.

Inequality between people and regions increases in conflicts. The situation is the worst in areas where problems that feed each other already exist and society's ability to take action is poor. According to the UN, the countries and regions that are already struggling with chronic poverty, conflicts, refugees and the effects of climate change are likely to be hit hardest by coronavirus. Some African countries are just recovering from the Ebola crisis. If a large-scale epidemic breaks out in these circumstances, the consequences will be catastrophic. Europe will not be safe either if our neighbouring regions plunge into a crisis or the virus starts to spread again.

In addition to the direct consequences, the traces left by the corona crisis will be visible for a long time at the national, regional and international level. If the multilateral system cannot respond to the crisis jointly and efficiently, inequality between states may deepen and trust in the ability of the international system to take action may erode even further.

In this publication of the Development Policy Committee, we will discuss the impacts of the coronavirus epidemic especially from the perspective of sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the problems can, however, be generalised to apply to poor and fragile countries and they affect people's ability to cope across the world. We will also propose recommendations for how Finland should

<sup>1</sup> The concept "fragile state" refers generally to countries whose societies share many factors that increase uncertainty, insecurity or vulnerability. These include the poor functioning of institutions sustaining society, economic inequality, political instability and/or armed conflicts, which may trigger a wider collapse of the system in the entire state. This is most likely in contexts and situations with a background of widespread, recurrent violence. The list of fragile countries keeps changing and is political. For example, there are differences between the listings of the OECD, the World Bank and the Fragile States Index. On the other hand, the G7+ countries, which have been classed as fragile states, use this category in international cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> For up-to-date information on the spread of coronavirus, see WHO's websites <https://who.sprinklr.com/>; <https://extranet.who.int/publicemergency>

respond to the situation as part of the international community. We want to draw special attention to the nature of the corona crisis at the point where humanitarian and development assistance meet. A lot can still be saved by anticipating and taking fast coordinated action.

The corona crisis increases the need for

humanitarian assistance, but it also makes the existing humanitarian crises worse. For this reason, support for existing catastrophes in the current crisis areas cannot be decreased even in the middle of the corona crisis. We hope that Finland will do all in its power both at home and internationally to prevent large-scale catastrophes.<sup>3</sup>

## **Destruction of natural environments as the root cause and spreader of epidemics**

People's wellbeing is linked to the state of the globe and how we take care of the life-sustaining biodiversity and ecosystems.

Two thirds of human communicable diseases also occur in animals, from which they can be transmitted to people. The transmission of zoonotic viruses to people has accelerated in the past 60 years as a result of the increased human impact on natural environments.

Land use changes and especially the felling of the biologically diverse tropical forests to make room for human activities in new, previously unlogged areas bring people and wild animals into closer contact with each other. Furthermore, wildlife trade is an important root cause of the spread of new zoonotic viruses. The virus causing the COVID-19 disease is suspected to have originated from a food market selling live domestic and wild animals.

Similar epidemics could probably be prevented by addressing live animal trade at markets, wildlife trade and the destruction of natural environments. The measures taken to curb and adapt to climate change, including nature-based solutions, are important so that habitats can be saved and the spread of diseases controlled.

Developing countries need support in taking these measures. Support is needed for the development and implementation of environmental administration, legislation and legal proceedings. The agriculture and forestry sector plays a key role especially in ensuring the food security of communities, for example, by enhancing the sustainability of agriculture and the availability of alternative sources of protein. It must be noted that wild animals and wild meat (bush meat) play an important role in food security in some places in developing countries. They are an important source of protein. Access to clean water and better hygiene also play a key role in preventing viruses from spreading. Cooperation between the environmental, forest, agricultural and health sectors is therefore necessary in the prevention of future epidemics.

Financial support and strengthening the capabilities of developing countries to curb wildlife trade and prevent the destruction of natural environments will be significantly less expensive and humanely more sustainable than recurrent pandemics and a stalling economy both in developing and in developed countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has been estimated to cost the global economy thousands of billions of euros during 2020 alone. Correspondingly, the World Bank has estimated that achieving a sufficient level of preparedness to prevent future epidemics would cost only USD 1.69 per person.

More information The statement of the Acting Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on 7 April 2020: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/speech/2020/sp-2020-04-07-health-en.pdf> )

For more information on the importance of wild meat, see CBD/COP/14/INF/7 Towards a sustainable participatory and inclusive wild meat sector

3 The Finns Party's view is that Finland cannot currently increase the funding for development cooperation or humanitarian assistance but must work within the framework of the current resources. Finland's economic prospects give cause for concern and there will be a considerable increase in government debt. If Finland's economy falls to a record low level, we will face cuts that will also affect development funding. We therefore have to focus on taking care of our own economy.

## Many things speed up the spread of the virus

In the poorest African countries and in fragile regions, many factors together speed up the risk of contracting the disease and the spread of the virus. The most common risk factors include the lack of clean water, water services, sanitation, hygiene, food security and waste management. The ability of a person who is malnourished or suffers from diarrhoea to resist the disease is already very low as it is. Furthermore, other communicable diseases and diseases weakening the immune system, such as HIV, AIDS and tuberculosis, make them vulnerable to infections.

Evening out the peak of the disease is globally the key strategy in slowing down the spread of the virus. Efforts are made to even out the peak by practicing physical distancing and handwashing. However, it is not possible to practise physical distancing in refugee camps, the slums of megacities and cramped dwellings. Handwashing is also difficult if there is no running water.

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As a result of climate change, diseases transmitted by insects will increase especially in areas with abundant rainfall. As the temperatures rise, people's tolerance to heat is being tested. All these reasons in turn weaken people's ability to resist disease. Destruction of tropical forests for agriculture, mines and cities, construction of roads through forests, and hunting and trading of wild animals increase the risk of diseases being transmitted from animals to humans.

The poor state of healthcare in the poorest countries, the low coverage of basic health services and the quality of treatment were a significant obstacle to development even before the spread of coronavirus.<sup>4</sup> In the past few years, the achievements in the field of health have mainly been related to defeating individual diseases as a result of vaccination programmes or campaigns against HIV and AIDS. Far less national and international attention, on the other hand, has been paid to the development of public healthcare systems and services. The budgets of public health services are often completely inadequate for the population's needs. In low-income countries, only a few per cent of GDP is spent on health instead of the five per cent recommended by WHO. The spread of the coronavirus epidemic burdens the operational reliability of sectors critical for the functioning of society everywhere. For example, the failure of water services or energy supply further weakens the functioning of the health services.

## Corona crisis cuts resources from other health services

It is likely that the spreading coronavirus epidemic will take precedence over basic healthcare and the treatment of diseases when the required resources are not available. In particular, this will lead to cuts in the health services that are important for women. For example, during the Ebola epidemic in West Africa between 2014–2016, when funds were transferred from basic healthcare to measures against Ebola, the vaccination coverage plummeted and maternal mortality increased by 75% in three crisis countries.<sup>5</sup> When coronavirus spreads, it is indeed important to continue work on basic healthcare in the world's poorest countries. For example, the spread of measles may be worse than coronavirus in many areas if people do not get vaccinations because of the

<sup>4</sup> Information on the shortage of healthcare and clean water in different African countries is available in Afrobarometer [http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/blogs/afrobarometer\\_vulnerabilities\\_and\\_resources\\_in\\_the\\_time\\_of\\_covid19.pdf](http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/blogs/afrobarometer_vulnerabilities_and_resources_in_the_time_of_covid19.pdf); see also <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2020/04/08/global-response-to-covid-19-in-africa-must-protect-lives-livelihoods-and-freedoms/>

<sup>5</sup> ACAPS, "Beyond a Public Health Emergency," ACAPS, February 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/a-potential-secondary-humanitarian-impacts-of-a-large-scale-ebola-outbreak.pdf>.

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coronavirus epidemic.

The shortage of trained nurses and doctors and of protective equipment and medical devices is a daily problem even before the pandemic. For example, only 4% of the global healthcare workforce is in Africa, whose share of the global disease burden is 25%.<sup>6</sup> The disease burden means the total detriment caused to public health as a result of untimely deaths or permanent health detriments.

Many trained doctors and nurses have gone to work abroad, for example, to Europe. Education systems cannot train the required number of staff even for the basic tasks. In crisis situations, international health workers are called back to their home countries. Furthermore, extremely limited testing and diagnosing opportunities make it more difficult to form an overall picture and communicate information. The treatment of serious cases of COVID-19 caused by coronavirus is challenging. Hospitals are struggling even in countries with

top-level specialised medical care. Many countries do not even have the laboratory capacity for conducting basic examinations, let alone the equipment and safety laboratories required for the virus analyses. The number of cases of COVID-19 so far confirmed in African countries may reflect this capacity: the number of diseases is the highest in countries that have the laboratory and sample collection capacity (South Africa, Algeria and Egypt). A lack of disease monitoring results in many of the infections being detected too late. Lack of reporting may hide the severity of the situation.

People may also be afraid of seeking treatment as they would risk contracting the disease because of insufficient basic hygiene and prevention of infections in the places of treatment. Securing reliable and timely information for everyone is difficult. Just like everywhere else, false information spreads easily, especially in the social media. In addition, the dissemination of information is complicated by a lack of trust between the authorities and the citizens. Mistrust may also extend to foreign aid workers, who may be regarded as possible “bringers of disease”. Many other beliefs are also associated with diseases and the fear of being labelled further increases the threshold for seeking treatment. If correct information is not available, those who have contracted the disease may be rejected by their community. Multiplier effects affect the coping of families and, ultimately, the coping of the entire society and economy.

## Vulnerable people bear the biggest risk

When the authorities' ability to prepare and take action is very limited, those hit hardest by the crisis are the poor majority of society. Deficiencies in social security and social services make the situation extremely serious in the majority of African countries. The deep financial crisis resulting from the coronavirus epidemic tests the funding of the already fragile basic services and undermines their implementation. Non-existent or sparse social security systems do not soften the financial shock resulting from the coronavirus epidemic in fragile states in the same way as in developed countries. As a result, the consequences of the crisis fall directly on the shoulders of vulnerable people, increasing financial and human suffering.

The biggest risk is borne by people who are already in a vulnerable position. Women, girls, older people and different minorities are especially vulnerable in the face of the pandemic. The promisingly growing middle class is also in difficulties in many countries.

Especially the socio-economic status of people with disabilities is in every way worse than that of people without disabilities. WHO has estimated that approximately 15% of the world's population is disabled in different ways. This affects their opportunities to receive information about the virus, ability to protect themselves from it and access to healthcare. Disabilities may be as common as 30–40% of the population in fragile states and societies that are rebuilding their operations after a catastrophe or a conflict or are still living in the middle of a crisis. Women and girls with disabilities face multiple discrimination.

The corona crisis may also affect the progress of gender equality. In healthcare, 70% of the workforce are women and in developing countries most of them work in poorly paid positions without sufficient training. The risk is that, without sufficient further training, guidance and occupational safety and health, the pressure caused by coronavirus will focus on them.

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The expectations that women and girls are responsible for housework and the care of sick family members increase the risk of the disease and narrow the opportunities to earn an income. Because of the low appreciation of women and girls, they may be the last ones in the community to receive medical treatment and medicines. Furthermore, it has been discovered that crises also increase violence against women and girls at home. A more tense societal situation also increases the threat of violence against boys and men.

Education has been shown to significantly lower the number of children. When schools are closed, children stay at home and their school path is interrupted at least temporarily. The risk of dropping out of school increases because of social, financial and health-related reasons. For example, teenage marriages and pregnancies increased in Sierra Leone during the Ebola crisis. Violence against and abuse of children is at risk of increasing. Street children and children who have been separated from their families face a particularly high risk.

## The epidemic erodes food security, industries and basic services

The World Food Programme WFP warns that, in addition to the direct effects on health, the pandemic may affect the availability of food and increase the price of foods when the delivery chains are broken. Despite being agricultural countries, many sub-Saharan countries depend on imported food. Food production in the countries will also become increasingly difficult. Obtaining the required agricultural inputs is already a real problem that will unavoidably lead to poor harvests in the following years. Poor distribution logistics makes the situation worse. Now that tourist flights have ended, it is impossible to export fresh products as freight prices have multiplied. Poor families spend a large part of their income on food, which means that an increase in food prices will rapidly hit poor households, especially women and children. Weaker food security in turn will shake social and political stability.<sup>7</sup>

The epidemic and the consequent exceptional measures destroy jobs and services that are important for ordinary people. The proportion of the informal

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see for example <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/covid-19-pandemic>; see also <http://www.fao.org/2019-ncov/q-and-a/impact-on-food-and-agriculture/en/>

economy and those working in it in the sub-Saharan Africa is huge.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the line between the formal and the informal economy is vague in practice as the position of workers is weak in many sectors. As a result of economic fluctuations and the tightening economic situation, workers may rapidly become part of the informal economy. According to UN Women, the UN organisation for gender equality, women and girls account for almost 75% of the workers in the informal sector.

It is not possible for these people to isolate themselves in their homes or accumulate savings even to tide them over the immediate danger. Labour law does not protect those working in the informal economy, nor are they entitled to social benefits such as paid sick leave, sickness insurance or pension. According to the report of the UN's labour organisation ILO, only one in five workers are entitled to social benefits.<sup>9</sup> The deficiencies in public social security fall on the shoulders of mothers, grandmothers and older sisters, as it is usually women's responsibility to care for the weakest ones. In addition to their care obligations, however, women also have to work outside home, often at the cost of their own health and the health of people close to them. In poor conditions, families and people with disabilities cannot obtain enough food and medicine to last for the long quarantine periods.

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### Cash assistance provides relief in the corona crisis

In developing countries too, social policy measures play a key role in the management of the corona crisis. For example, many African countries have extensive programmes based on cash assistance (*cash transfer programmes*) that may for their part guarantee that the basic needs of the poorest people are met during and after the corona crisis. Cash assistance also enables workers in the informal sector to stay away from the streets and markets in critical times without losing their livelihood.

For example, the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development has its own *Social Protection Across the Humanitarian Development Nexus network*. In the network, humanitarian work also develops economically and socially sustainable social and health security structures. The structures remain in the country when the humanitarian assistance ends. Similarly, the plans and structures of social and health security and preparedness must be developed during "peaceful times". Humanitarian work should use them actively and strengthen them when a humanitarian crisis occurs.

<sup>8</sup> The informal sector is the part of work and livelihood that is outside legislative enforcement but not actually criminal. It does not produce any tax revenue. The informal sector grows when the formal (public or private) sector cannot provide enough education and training and jobs with a decent wages to the increasing working-age population. It includes groups such as household workers, street hawkers, market vendors and various other self-employed people. The activities are carried out on a small scale, barely exceeding the poverty line, and are not defined or protected by law.

<sup>9</sup> ILO Covid-19 World of Work Report.

## State of emergency is a threat to democracy and increases the likelihood of conflicts

Conditions such as the state of emergency are a threat to democracy as the management of instability may also be used as a reason to limit human rights and narrow down the space for civil society and the opportunities for NGOs to operate. Crisis situations and addressing their consequences often make it possible to take through reforms and restrictions. Measures restricting the social and political space should be of a short duration, determined and defined in as much detail as possible, and the normal freedoms should be returned as soon as possible. This is also important because NGOs have an important role in the maintenance and development of basic services in many countries. If the state of emergency results in narrowing down democracy and the role of the organisations, the provision of services at the grassroots level will also be affected. Furthermore, restricting the freedom of speech slows down access to information and delays measures.

As a result of the epidemic, fragile societies and states will become even more fragile. The effectiveness of public administration on the one hand and its legitimacy on the other play to a key role: are the measures targeted at controlling the pandemic effective and has the crisis been handled in a way that creates trust and openness? In places where citizens' trust in the authorities is weak as it is, a crisis situation may further deepen the lack of trust and affect the stability of societies.

Typical crisis situations bring smouldering political pressures to the surface and exacerbate old disputes. If trust in the political system is low, postponing elections because of coronavirus may increase mistrust and undermine stability. The state of emergency also threatens peace processes and efforts and the implementation of agreements. Their continuity must be ensured. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has called on parties to conflicts across the world to agree to a ceasefire during coronavirus. Finland supports this appeal together with other 52 states.

On the other hand, the exceptional situation may be an opportunity to gather together the parties to conflicts to discuss what measures could be taken to limit it. Creating a dialogue, supporting participation and

increasing trust is now more important than ever. The crisis may also be an opportunity for the international community to promote the achievement of peaceful solutions to violent political conflicts. One example is the catastrophe caused by the tsunami in Southeast Asia, which contributed to the conclusion of the Aceh peace agreement. Finland and the EU managed to combine emergency aid and appropriately timed and resourced peace negotiation in cooperation with Asian actors.

## Economic growth grinds to a halt and the debt burden grows

The economic impacts of an extensive epidemic are detrimental in terms of the countries' GDP, exports and accumulation of public debt. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD has already reduced this year's projected economic growth for Africa from 2.9% to 1.5%. On the other hand, it is clear that especially the poorest countries will now have to take on more debt. The International Monetary Fund IMF and regional development funding institutions therefore have an important role. It is essential to immediately review the repayments and interest expenses of current credits so that resources can be directed to the proactive management of the crisis.

Trade protectionism is also increasing between countries. The threat of coronavirus has already stopped the negotiations of the African Continental Free Trade Area, AfCFTA. It has been hoped that the free trade area will boost closer cooperation between the countries and the economic growth and development in Africa. The negotiations were due to be launched at the beginning of June. With the outbreak of the pandemic, the countries may back down from the preliminary negotiating positions for dismantling obstacles to trade. The need to first secure the national interests will have a global impact on many trade-related issues.

The macroeconomic impacts of coronavirus will hit many countries affected by humanitarian crises regardless of how extensively the disease itself will spread in them. The countries in the greatest danger are ones that are dependent on agricultural exports, oil exports, foreign money transfers and imported food and in which the level of government debt is high and the currency reserves low. The macroeconomic impacts may further



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deepen humanitarian crises and increase the need for international aid, for example, in the heavily indebted Jordan, Lebanon and Sudan, in South Sudan, which is dependent on oil exports and imported food, and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Venezuela and Libya, which rely on imported goods.

The fear of economic impacts may lead to cases of the disease not being reported to WHO according to the International Health Regulations (IHR). This will in turn delay the measures taken to curb the epidemic and speed up the spread of diseases between countries.

A part of the healthcare in fragile countries relies on financial support from the diaspora. The money transfers migrants send to their families and relatives are often an important source of “health insurance” that is used to cover the costs of medical care. The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the depression threaten the livelihood of the diaspora even in wealthy areas and, consequently, these vital money transfers.

The importance of transborder natural resources and the potential disputes related to them come to a head in crisis situations when countries start to protect their own interests. Water resources are one of the main issues. Water resource issues are directly related to the sufficiency of water in water supply, but also to agriculture and its capability to produce food.

## Anticipation and seamless cooperation are crucial

Anticipation, the role of local healthcare actors, and cooperation between international parties are crucial in the fight against coronavirus. Many countries have learned lessons from the efforts made to curb the spread of the Ebolavirus and other communicable diseases and their treatment.<sup>10</sup> However, the epidemic caused by coronavirus is a challenge on a whole new scale. The epidemic is more difficult to restrict, the virus transmits treacherously and there are not enough resources for its treatment. The world cannot afford a situation in which the development efforts of poor countries turn into a humanitarian crisis, especially not in Africa.

Because the resources in medical care are sparse in poor countries, the focus must be on prevention. Preventive measures focusing on individuals and the community are the most effective ways to restrict the spread the disease. The most effective way to prevent the spread of the virus is to limit contacts and maintain basic hygiene, with the most important action being handwashing with water and soap.

Local NGOs play an important role in limiting the spread of the disease. The organisations are there when the crisis begins and they remain in the country after the crisis has ended. They are also familiar with the local conditions and customs. Effective prevention is based on a good understanding of people’s information needs, beliefs and health practices. NGOs can reach communities, regions and groups of people that the official communication cannot. Local NGOs also play an important part in the recovery from crises such as coronavirus as they help to identify the most vulnerable people and to support them until the crisis is over.

However, real and timely prevention means increasing the availability and coverage of health services when the health crisis can still be managed. This cannot be the responsibility of humanitarian, international or local NGOs alone. Instead, a strong investment by the public sector is required in each country. UN organisations, the Red Cross and worldwide health initiatives offer a good platform for this. UN organisations, such as the field offices of WHO, provide expert help to countries and coordinate the measures with the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. However, expertise from other international health actors is also needed to prevent the international UN system suffering from scarce funding

<sup>10</sup> In 2015 and 2016, the UN Ebola Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund, coordinated by the UN’s development organisation UNDP and founded in connection with the Ebola crisis that broke out in West Africa in 2014, collected a total of USD 170 million that were used to treat those infected with the disease, to secure the basic services, to identify and trace those infected, to organise safe funerals and to maintain stability. Finland was the eighth biggest sponsor of the fund.

from becoming overloaded. After the Ebola crisis in West Africa, the African Union has founded the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention tasked with managing the joint planning, communication and coordination between the countries.

The national organisations of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent work in their own countries as parties assisting the authorities in crisis situations through their networks of volunteers. The countries also have other local health organisations linked to the work of the health authorities. They have the preparedness to mobilise themselves fast to support the authorities in a crisis. In the corona crisis, health volunteers, who have often been trained with the development cooperation funds, are a great resource when additional hands are required worldwide. Religious leaders and actors also play an important role in communicating information and increasing awareness. The best response to epidemics is indeed based on rapid and professional harnessing of the local resources to carry out work that prevents the spread of the disease. In addition, it is important that NGOs promoting the SDGs, democracy and human rights can continue their work also during the crisis.

## International community responds to the corona crisis

The World Health Organization WHO and its partners published a strategic preparedness and response plan in February 2020. The plan totals USD 675 million and its objective is to support all countries in the key measures aimed at limiting the spread of coronavirus. The plan has been drawn up for three months and it will be updated.<sup>11</sup> Finland's support to WHO for the implementation of the plan totals EUR 1 million.

In March, when the crisis had become a pandemic, the UN published an exceptionally extensive worldwide humanitarian response plan and an emergency appeal (Global Humanitarian Response Plan GHRP) totalling USD 2 billion (EUR 1.8 billion). The appeal was made jointly by the UN organisations and it covers the most immediate measures for responding to the pandemic until the end of 2020. The plan and the need for funding is updated on a monthly basis. The measures of the humanitarian response plan will be targeted at 40 especially vulnerable countries. The organisations with

the greatest need for humanitarian funding are WHO, which is responsible for the health sector (USD 450 million); UNICEF, which is responsible for children and the water services and hygiene sector (USD 450 million); the World Food Programme WFP, which is responsible for food assistance and the logistics of the entire humanitarian system (USD 350 million), and the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR (USD 255 million).<sup>12</sup>

The UN's Central Emergency Response Fund CERF has granted a total of USD 75 million to UN organisations' humanitarian response to the pandemic, which is the largest funding decision concerning an individual crisis in the Fund's history. Finland's support to CERF is EUR 8 million per year. Finland is also preparing earmarked funding for the UN's worldwide emergency appeal.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and especially the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) operating in conflict areas have also opened their own supplementary global emergency appeals, totalling approximately 800 million Swiss francs. These appeals support the work of the national Red Cross and Red Crescent organisations to support both communities and the authorities in the fight against coronavirus. Work is also carried out in conflict countries in areas and places that cannot be accessed by other actors, such as in prisons. In Africa, 41 national associations participate in the work against coronavirus.

On 31 March 2020, the UN established a new inter-agency finance mechanism (COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi Partner Trust Fund) aimed at responding to the negative impacts the corona crisis has on development. The Fund is used to help low and middle-income countries in responding to the pandemic and recovering from the crisis. The Fund operates under the direct supervision of the UN's Secretary-General and the model for it is the Ebola fund, which has been considered effective. The new Fund supplements the strategic COVID-19 response and preparedness plan published by WHO in February and the COVID-19 emergency appeal published by the UN in March. It is targeted at the most vulnerable countries and people most affected by the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The Fund has three main goals: 1) to respond to the acute health crisis, 2) to promote the recovery of society and the economy and 3) to help rebuild more equal, more inclusive and more sustainable economies and societies after the crisis.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/donors-and-partners/funding>

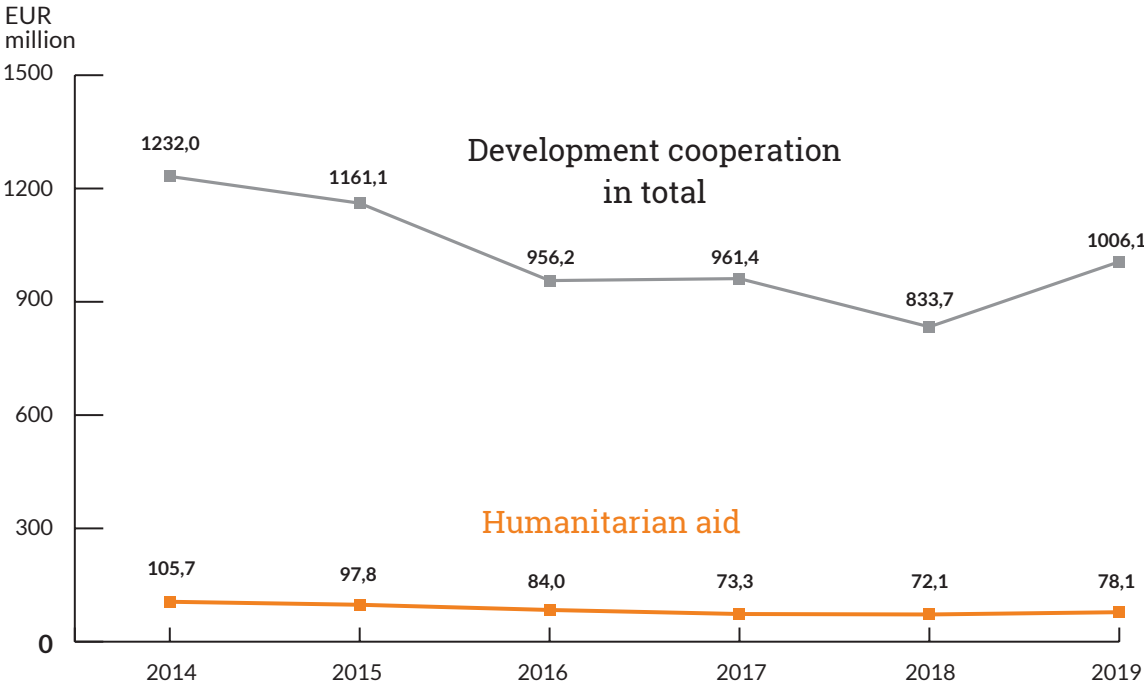
<sup>12</sup> <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Global-Humanitarian-Response-Plan-COVID-19.pdf>

The Fund’s purpose is to promote cooperation and a systematic approach between the UN organisations. Its work is based on the activities of the UN’s Resident Coordinators and the UN’s Country Teams, and their local knowledge and ability to react to local conditions. The Fund is aimed at granting support fast and flexibly to where it is most needed. In addition, it is meant to be catalytic and leverage more extensive flows of money. To achieve this, it cooperates with international financial institutions, promoting developing countries’ efforts to ensure necessary investments during the response to the pandemic and in the rebuilding stage. The Fund’s operation is based on sustainable development. The funding target is USD 2 billion, of which one billion has been allocated to the first nine months. The objective is to launch the projects at the beginning of May. The Fund covers a period of two years from April 2020 to April 2022.

The Fund is aimed at granting support fast and flexibly to where it is most needed.

The European Union’s support to the Global Humanitarian Response Plan so far amounts to EUR 276 million. Of this sum, EUR 113.5 million will be directed to WHO’s activities.<sup>13</sup>

Public development cooperation disbursements (ODA) 2014–2019



Source: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Unit for Administrative and Legal Development Cooperation Matters 2020

13 Situation on 8 April 2020

## EU emphasises multilateral cooperation

The corona crisis is an acid test for partnership plans between Europe and Africa. The new shared strategy is due to be accepted in the summit of the African Union and the European Union in October 2020. Until now, the EU has been the continent's most important trading partner, investor and party conducting development cooperation. Finland's trade policy and more than one fifth of Finland's development cooperation are channelled through the European Union.

According to the Communication on the *Global EU response to COVID-19*, published by the European Commission at the beginning of April, the EU strives to respond immediately to the challenge posed by the corona crisis especially in those partner countries in which healthcare and the economy are particularly vulnerable. The response forms one entity, which the EU calls the Team Europe approach. The EU emphasises the importance of a multilateral approach and cooperation with UN organisations and financial institutions. The most important elements in the EU's response are

related to emergency aid, supporting healthcare systems during the crisis and actions to support the economy.

As for emergency aid, the EU supports the actions of international organisations and provides logistic help required for organising health, water services, sanitation and hygiene. The manufacture of protective equipment and medicines will also be increased in Europe for the use of both the EU countries and the partner countries. The EU's objective is to strengthen healthcare preparedness, education, monitoring and communication and to supply medicines, healthcare devices and protective equipment. In this context, the EU will work directly through its own programmes and through WHO. The economic support measures proposed by the EU are based on three pillars: direct budget support, guarantees for loans and support for the private sector.

The total amount of the EU's crisis support announced by the Commission in its Communication is EUR 15.6 billion. The money is not additional, but part of the external action financing, which is now directed to the management of the crisis. The Communication does not discuss in more detail how the allocation affects other activities or the time after the crisis.

### The corona crisis emphasises the importance of improving social security

The corona crisis and the economic shock caused by it especially to the most vulnerable people further emphasise the importance of improving social security in developing countries. In the past few years, Finland has been one of the most active EU countries in terms of these issues. Between 2015–2019, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare THL led the EU's joint European Union Social Protection Systems Programme, as a result of which many African and Asian countries now have well-trained national social security experts. They can channel the cash assistance of social security in a cost-efficient way to poor families and families living in the informal economy – often to women.

Finland continues to be a member of Universal Social Protection, the joint steering group of governments and development organisations. In this role, it has been possible to contribute, even with relatively small investments, to stronger coordination of UN organisations, development banks, governments and NGOs and their successful cooperation programmes.

During the corona crisis, this work is visible through channels such as the [www.Socialprotection.org](http://www.Socialprotection.org)

portal built with Finland's support. In the portal, experts from the developing and funding countries and organisations develop joint measures against the spread of the pandemic through webinars, web trainings and peer learning of social security professionals. The web-based site Social Protections and Human Rights was also built with Finland's funding. By continuing funding, Finland could contribute to enabling the global measures against coronavirus to be guided by the human rights principles.

## Universal health coverage and health security as a shared goal

According to WHO, more than one half of the world's population does not have access to necessary health services. Approximately 100 million people are driven to extreme poverty every year because of health costs.

Ensuring good health and wellbeing for people of all ages is one of the main goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Goal 3). A prerequisite for this is equal access to the necessary and high-quality health services for everyone. In addition, safe, effective, inexpensive and high-quality medicines and vaccines must be available without financial difficulties resulting from the payments. This is called universal health coverage. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are also an essential part of it.

Last year, Finland committed itself to working at the level of the UN to accelerate measures to achieve global health coverage. High-quality social and health services and sufficient social security covering the entire population together are an effective way to prevent poverty, marginalisation and inequality caused by disease and disabilities. Finland is committed to promoting efforts to strengthen the capacity to detect, prepare for and prevent health threats in all countries, especially in developing countries. Health security requires measures to be taken jointly by different administrative sectors and by the whole society globally and in all countries.

Finland has for years cooperated to strengthen global health security and worked with African countries both in bilateral cooperation and through cross-administrative networks of international organisations. Finland has been involved in developing and participated in WHO's external health security assessments, which provide countries with information on their health security capacities and help them develop plans to improve them.

Health coverage and health security play an important role in the prevention of pandemics. This must be continued and strengthened in cooperation with the most suitable actors considering the task and the situation. Attention must be paid to ensuring that the rest of the health sector will not suffer although funds are transferred to the management of the epidemic.

However, health security is only one of the necessary health measures. In addition, health promotion, including measures taken to combat social problems

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and health inequality, is required, as well as stronger healthcare administration and efforts to ensure the competence of workforce, organisational structures and funding in the health sector. Communication and social mobilisation for the benefit of health are also important, as well as research and expert knowledge for the guidance of politicians and practices.

## Finland reinforces the health security of African countries

Finland has cooperated with different parties to strengthen global health security for a long time.

In Africa, it has carried out bilateral development cooperation and worked through international organisations. For example, Finland has been involved in developing WHO's assessments that provide information on countries' health security capacities and help to make cross-administrative plans to improve them.

In Somalia, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare THL has with funding from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs cooperated with the UN's Migration Agency and Somaliland's Ministry of Health and Development to support the Ministry in the implementation of international health regulations. This way, the prevention and detection of communicable diseases and fast reaction to public health threats such as coronavirus can be enhanced.

Finland has a development cooperation project in Tanzania where it trains local experts and authorities to identify biothreats and communicable diseases using fast identification methods suitable for the local conditions. In addition, training is provided in the management of biological risks in laboratories. The Centre for Military Medicine of the Finnish Defence Forces is responsible for the administration and implementation of the project.

Its partner is the Ministry of Agriculture of Tanzania. The five-year project launched in 2014 has been continued and in this year's project plan, activities are also directed to the fight against coronavirus.

## Risk of overlapping crises and expanding need for humanitarian assistance

Even before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the need for humanitarian assistance has globally been higher than even since the Second World War. The majority of the humanitarian assistance is needed in conflict zones. However, climate change and the decline in biodiversity increase the number of natural catastrophes demanding an increasing proportion of the insufficient humanitarian funding. Acute humanitarian crises are also becoming prolonged and more complicated. This is what has already happened with many of the crises in Africa and around the world. On the other hand, it is precisely addressing the root causes, for example, by means of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, prevention of risks of catastrophes, and fast action to tackle climate change and the decline in biodiversity, that reduces the need for humanitarian assistance and is cheaper in the long term.

The situation in the crisis areas is desperate even

without the coronavirus epidemic. According to the UN, the combination of the coronavirus epidemic and a humanitarian crisis is, however, likely in several countries and areas. Countries that are particularly vulnerable are those with a large number of refugees, internal refugees or people who suffer from an acute food crisis, meaning that the number of malnourished people depending on food aid is high. According to the UN, the countries facing the greatest risk are South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Haiti, Burundi, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Sudan and Malawi.

In 2019, there were more than 70 million people who had been forced to flee their homes globally. Of them, a record number of 41.3 million were internal refugees. In Syria alone, their number totals 6.1 million. The majority of the refugees come from five countries (Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo), most of which already have confirmed coronavirus infections. A large part of the burden of the refugee crises is often borne by poor and conflict-prone countries and regions such

as Uganda and Ethiopia in Africa, the areas neighbouring Syria in the Middle East (Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon), and Bangladesh in Asia. There are also critical areas within countries and at borders. People in the refugee camps in Greece are also a very vulnerable as healthcare is non-existent and the camps are densely populated. Water supply and sewerage and sanitation services are seriously inadequate or even non-existent. When the coronavirus epidemic breaks out, those who live in refugee camps and temporary shelters are in the greatest danger – especially malnourished children, children without a guardian, older people and persons with chronic diseases or different disabilities.<sup>15</sup>

The humanitarian assistance system is faced with a huge challenge. How should we proceed when a new crisis is linked to an existing one and the operating conditions become even more difficult? For example, disruptions in delivery chains, travel restrictions and counter-terrorism measures and sanctions restrict the work of aid workers in existing crisis areas.

The virus, on the other hand, knows no borders. In the face of the coronavirus threat, it is important that prevention, preparedness, rescuing, assistance and recovery form a continuum.

The most important thing is to be able to act at the beginning of the pandemic. This requires additional funding in a situation in which the existing funding has already been allocated to ongoing crises.<sup>16</sup> However, it is of utmost importance that existing humanitarian work can be continued and assistance funds can be found for new catastrophes. Coronavirus will not stop any ongoing humanitarian crisis or prevent future catastrophes. By linking the activities of humanitarian work and development cooperation, humanitarian actors can support preparedness for the corona crisis and prevent the spread of the epidemic in areas affected by humanitarian crises and instability. At the same time, development cooperation actors prevent new crises from breaking out by helping people to recover from the corona crisis. If ever, now is the time to strengthen the complementariness of the different forms of aid by appropriately integrating and coordinating different forms of aid. Finland has recently outlined its humanitarian assistance (2019), which is a good starting point for developing the activities.

The challenge faced by international actors, including Finland, has been the lack of a holistic approach in rapidly changing situations. Development cooperation,

peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance are not linked to each other seamlessly enough and there are still unnecessary boundaries between the actors. For example, the different stages of catastrophes must be funded from different sources, which makes the measures taken less systematic and less seamless. The funding required for long-term recovery – which may also be needed for the far-reaching consequences of coronavirus – is difficult to obtain when the most acute crisis is over. In addition to increasing the flexibility of funding, efforts must be made to promote different humanitarian funding models based on projections and anticipation so that sufficient preparedness, timely responses to catastrophes and the continuity of development cooperation throughout crises and catastrophes can be ensured. The goals of peacebuilding should also be considered in this context. While the links between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation are being developed, it is important to safeguard the independence of humanitarian work especially in conflict zones and not mix it with activities with a more political aim. Humanitarian aid must be provided to those who need it and it should not be governed by political, economic or military reasons. Year by year, humanitarian work has also become more dangerous for the aid workers.

Problems tend to become intertwined and feed each other. The same dynamics should be created between solutions and the people who make them. In the middle of the crisis, we must not forget the importance of addressing the root causes of the problems. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 goals set the direction and goals for this work.<sup>17</sup>

Problems tend to become intertwined and feed each other. The same dynamics should be created between solutions and the people who make them.

<sup>15</sup> Information Finnish Red Cross.

<sup>16</sup> The Finns Party's view is that Finland cannot currently increase the funding for development cooperation or humanitarian assistance but must work within the framework of the current resources.

<sup>17</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

## What should Finland do?

Epidemics concretise the mutual dependency between the continents, countries and people. Together with other countries and international communities, Finland must prepare for a large-scale spread of coronavirus and the deepening of the existing crises in Africa and fragile states across the world. Because the wide-ranging consequences of the corona crisis will affect all areas of society and hit the most vulnerable people in society hardest, the response must be on the same scale. In spite of the domestic situation, Finland is capable of supporting the efforts of crisis countries in a variety of ways and at different levels as part of the international community and according to the principles of sustainable development and humanitarian assistance.


According to the Government Programme, Finland is preparing an Africa strategy, aimed at intensifying relations based on shared interests. In this context, the fight against the coronavirus epidemic and its fundamental reasons cannot be ignored. The African Union, the EU and Finland are committed to promoting the 2030 Agenda and creating partnerships that will strengthen it. It forms the best framework for long-term activities in the different policy areas and in the business sector. Actors that support local actors during the

corona crisis and in the economic recession following it will accumulate trust capital. Many countries monitor their partners closely to see who is also a reliable partner during the most difficult times.

The most effective measures are proactive measures that support especially the ability of poor countries to prepare for and respond to the epidemic and recover from it. They will also save costs in the long term. At the beginning of the crisis, immediate measures related to health and basic needs are emphasised. At the same time, we must also look further. Immediate and long-term measures are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they should form a coordinated entity in which they support each other. For example, the long-term priorities of Finland's development policy – strengthening the status and rights of women and girls; strengthening the economic base of developing countries and creating jobs; education, well-functioning societies and democracy; and climate change and natural resources – are important both during and after the crisis.

Finland's challenge continues to be how to develop an approach that will combine humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, development policy and peacebuilding aimed at conflict resolution. The corona crisis makes this issue an urgent one.

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## Finland's immediate measures to slow down the spread of the epidemic

It is important to identify the partners with the best possible preparedness and existing channels for taking action when a crisis breaks out, the best situational analysis and the ability to identify the most vulnerable groups. In this context, the UN and the coordinated initiatives of humanitarian actors play a key role.

Support for local actors and the role of NGOs are also emphasised in crisis situations, both in preventive work and in safeguarding human rights and the rights of local minorities, such as people with disabilities.

The corona crisis forces everyone to adapt and modify activities in all sectors. It is therefore important for Finland to receive up-to-date and reliable information on the course of the crisis and its impacts through its different partners. Decision-making must be speeded up, unnecessary bureaucracy in appealing must be avoided, and it must be possible to use funding more flexibly for a justified reason. Funding must be directed to where it is most needed and it must be allocated fairly.

## Humanitarian assistance

- It is important that Finland respond to the UN's worldwide emergency appeal and response plan immediately.
- Finland must also support the appeals made by the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement. This way, the support will be allocated to local partners and to their work in communities, their cooperation with the authorities and their aid work in difficult conflict zones.
- The growing need for humanitarian assistance requires increased and flexible funding. However, this increase must not be taken mainly from other development funding that promotes long-term objectives. Channelling funds to the corona crisis must also not increase human suffering in the existing crises or future catastrophes.<sup>18</sup>
- The needs related to sexual and reproductive health increase during crises and they are an entirely underfunded part of international humanitarian work. Finland must for its part make sure that this

perspective is strengthened. Education must also be taken into account better when crises become prolonged.

## Development cooperation

- Finland must adhere to the systematic and long-term approach in its development policy. Even though the impacts of the corona crisis must be taken into account and included in development cooperation as much as possible, the crisis must not take precedence over other measures. Especially the support required by civil society must be paid attention to.
- Corona funding must also be channelled to medium-term and long-term development goals that help to better prepare and respond to similar pandemics.
- Development funding and the allocation plans for development cooperation must with immediate effect be made more flexible to enable the development cooperation actors to adapt their activities without risking the results and achievements of long-term work. For example, flexibility is needed in the budgets and self-financing conditions of programme funding.
- Finland must be able to direct the development cooperation funding that was not used in 2020 to targets that are strategic in terms of the corona crisis.

## Multilateral cooperation

- It is extremely important that Finland participate in the *COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi Partner Trust Fund* of UN organisations, which is aimed at responding to the acute health crisis and promoting the recovery of society and the economy.
- Finland's support to the World Health Organization WHO and the labour organisation ILO must be reassessed so that universal health coverage can urgently be improved and jobs and industries can be secured in the poorest countries. In this context, bringing Finland's share of funding to WHO

<sup>18</sup> The Finns Party's view is that Finland cannot currently increase the funding for development cooperation or humanitarian assistance but must work within the framework of the current resources.

back to the previous level (EUR 5.5 million) is an important decision.

- Water services and sanitation are very important for the health sector in terms of the whole cycle of the crisis, people's wellbeing and the recovery of society. Finland has strong expertise and proof of different forms of cooperation in this area.

### Cooperation in the private sector

- Obtaining reliable and up-to-date information is an important part of managing the crisis and needs to be supported. Finnish companies have expertise in disseminating health information and organising health consultations in different local languages by means of mobile phones.
- Financial investments should be channelled through Finnish actors to ensure that they also reach the smallest companies and the poorest areas. Funding from large multilateral actors is often not accessible to smaller actors.

### Cooperation as part of the European Union

- Finland must be an active operator in "Team Europe" and follow how the funds directed to the coronavirus crisis response are used. It must also follow their impacts on both the crisis and those areas of external action financing from which funding has been moved to the crisis response.
- The EU and its Member States can jointly influence international financing institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Finland must actively contribute to ensuring that the economies of the poorest countries are supported responsibly and in the long term through these institutions. Attention must be paid especially to the total management of debts in these countries and possible debt relief.
- The EU must emphasise the importance of the fundamental and human rights and recommend that, as a rule, any restrictions to the fundamental rights should comply with the minimum principle and their duration should be strictly defined. It is

also important to highlight the state of freedom of communication and media in the policy dialogue with partner countries and support the freedom of speech in exceptional conditions.

### Long-term measures alongside immediate measures

The corona crisis further emphasises the importance of sustainable development and its goals everywhere. Finland must focus on supporting the transition to a sustainable economy in which the Earth's carrying capacity and nature-based solutions are central. In the current climate and environmental crisis, new operating models play a crucial role in tackling global overconsumption and adapting the operation of societies' to the Earth's carrying capacity. Each new and old operating model must be adapted to the limits of the carrying capacity, which will strengthen the resilience and adaptation of the ecosystem and human activities to exceptional situations in the long term. Nature conservation (preventing the destruction of environments), curbing wildlife trade and investing in sustainable local industries will be significantly less expensive and humanely more sustainable in the long run than pandemics recurring at a few years' intervals and a stalling global economy, which will harm fragile states most.

It is extremely important that Finland continue foreign and development policy based on human rights and support the regional cooperation of African countries also under the state of emergency. It is increasingly important to strengthen the economies and own resource bases of African countries in a sustainable manner through responsible business cooperation, trade and taxation. Because the crisis targets especially the most vulnerable groups, Finland must strengthen long-term work on equality and non-discrimination in all development policy and at all levels. It is also particularly important to pay attention to and promote all measures aimed at maintaining and promoting women's position in the labour market during the crisis. Access to the labour market and the opportunities to stay there are a key factor in the implementation of women's rights in the world of work and human rights.

Finland should have the opportunity to develop the capabilities and preparedness of the security authorities

in fragile states to cooperate with the other authorities in potential exceptional situations. Broad-based cooperation would include preparedness planning and the planning of anticipatory measures to prepare for different scenarios threatening security. Such preparedness and capability strengthen regions' capacity to take immediate action when problems emerge. It is also important to include NGOs in this work. For example, the national organisations of the Red Cross have a special role in supporting the authorities in preparedness.

- Finland must work in the EU, the UN and financial institutions to ensure that sufficient funds are directed to addressing the root causes of epidemics, that is, to preventing the destruction of natural environments and to curbing wildlife trade.
- Finland must continue and strengthen its efforts to improve food and nutrition security and develop sustainable agriculture, international trade and food value chains. The starting point for the sustainable use of natural resources must be a holistic approach that includes food, water, energy and forests. A sustainable food system is essential for coping in crisis situations. Safeguarding biodiversity is a prerequisite for it this.

Finland must invest in education especially during the current global crisis. Schools and teachers are an important channel providing families and children with information and critical instructions related to health and rights.

- The development of the African Union's peace mediation activities and anticipation tools must be continued. Conflict prevention and resolution processes must continue to be based on the local situation and continuous conflict analysis.
- Preparedness and crisis preparedness must be enhanced at all levels: locally, nationally, regionally and internationally.
- The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on education are enormous and its consequences will be visible for a long time. Education and competence play a key role in addressing the consequences of the pandemic and in preparing for the future. Finland must invest in education especially during the current global crisis. Schools and teachers are an important channel providing families and children with information and critical instructions related to health and rights. Furthermore, the development and implementation of digital platforms suitable for distance learning must be speeded up.
- Issues related to the world of work, participation, equal treatment, social dialogue and its promotion at the local level must be discussed as a cross-cutting theme in Finland's development projects. Measures that support the structures of society and individuals' opportunities to move to the formal economy are important from the perspective of promoting decent work. Protecting the most vulnerable people and focusing policy measures on these groups is also essential in terms of combatting poverty. The International Labour Organisation ILO is an important partner in this work
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights have been the object of constant attacks on global forums over the past few years. In spite of the crisis caused by coronavirus, it continues to be important that Finland work actively to defend women's' rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights, support family planning and fund them through its development cooperation.