

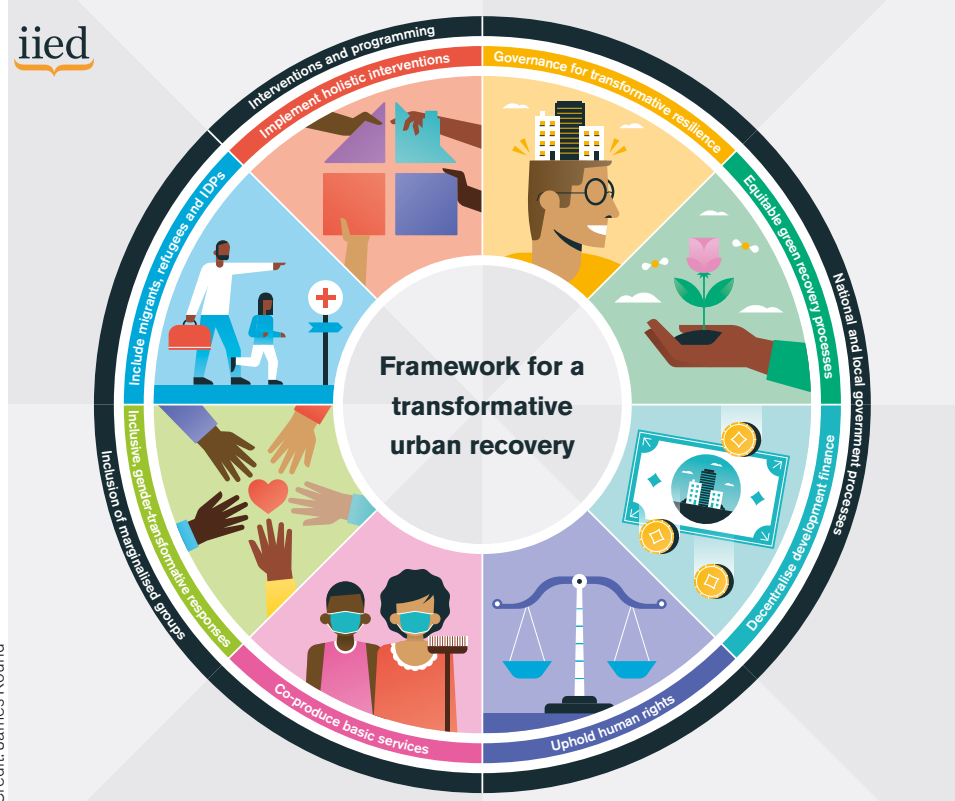
Backgrounder

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Credit: James Round

Figure 1. Framework for a transformative urban recovery (see sidebar for additional detail)

Transformative urban recovery from COVID-19

A new framework to unify, inform and resource the process of change in the global South

The COVID-19 pandemic is arguably an urban issue: the UN estimates that at least 90% of COVID-19 cases are located in urban areas. An extensive 2020 survey by Save the Children reported that people living in urban areas were almost twice as likely to have lost their jobs during the pandemic as those living in rural areas.

The economic impacts are increasingly acute in cities across the global South, where the

pandemic represents a crisis on a crisis that threatens the 2030 agenda. Informal workers, people living in informal settlements, displaced people and other marginalised groups are disproportionately affected. Many of the pandemic's impacts are gender-inequitable and have contributed to a caregiving emergency as well as escalating levels of domestic violence. Women are overrepresented in informal jobs and hard-hit sectors like tourism and domestic work;

THE TUR FRAMEWORK: EIGHT ACTIONS

- 1 Support governance processes that promote transformative resilience to multiple risks.** The quality of local governance and use of local knowledge strongly influences access to shelter, infrastructure and emergency response, including during pandemics.
- 2 Implement transformative green recovery processes that recognise and manage trade-offs.** Responses that promote a green recovery process (eg, nature-based solutions, low-carbon built environments, support for circular economy) must also respond to local political realities and benefit low-income communities.
- 3 Create and expand mechanisms to decentralise sustained urban development finance.** Decentralised funding streams can significantly tackle existing inequalities and offer more than temporary, short-term relief measures.
- 4 Promote evidence-based responses that are non-discriminatory and uphold human rights in urban areas.** Key human rights must be respected, protected and fulfilled throughout all recovery actions including rights to housing, food, education, water and the right to work.
- 5 Institutionalise mechanisms for co-producing basic services with residents of informal settlements, while also strengthening informal workers' livelihoods via multi-pronged interventions and partnerships.** The informal economy has a key role in providing housing, basic services and livelihoods, especially for low-income groups in urban areas.

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at the same time, they are shouldering increased caring duties and often lack access to childcare.

Responses to the initial wave of COVID-19 in the cities of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) were characterised by the limited provision of appropriate social protection or emergency relief, alongside strict lockdowns, disrupted supply chains, forced evictions and other regressive interventions. This prescriptive top-down approach escalated levels of poverty and food insecurity for informal labourers and residents of informal settlements, while failing to stem the spread of disease. Since then, the rise of more transmissible variants, in combination with overburdened health systems and persistent challenges in containing the outbreak, have deepened the impacts of COVID-19 across much of the global South.

Lessons from local action

Local governments and residents of informal settlements have been particularly effective in mobilising to respond to COVID-19, which has meaningfully reduced transmission and fostered solidarity during the crisis. Community health volunteers have raised awareness and helped support vulnerable residents in informal settlements; grassroots organisations have demonstrated tremendous capacity to meet the immediate basic needs of low-income urban groups, as well as develop more strategic responses to the pandemic. Policymakers can learn from these bottom-up responses as they seek to develop appropriate, equitable urban recovery processes.

From vision to recovery

Vaccines are reaching some LMIC cities, but there is no single path out of the pandemic, particularly for precarious informal workers and settlements. Rather, a flexible approach is needed that can support multiple recovery pathways while responding to prevailing uncertainties linked to COVID-19, climate change and economic crisis. Working with an inclusive, holistic vision can promote transformative recovery processes and spark the multi-faceted interventions urgently required to address the complex exclusions and risks facing low-income residents of LMIC cities. Putting this into practice will require:

- Ongoing collaboration between civil society organisations and key urban decision makers
- Decentralised financial mechanisms and policymaking strategies

- Equitable governance to foster resilience in the face of ongoing uncertainty, risks and disruption in urban contexts.

Introducing the TUR framework

To create a shared vision, IIED hosted a series of workshops from autumn 2020 with international agencies, researchers and urban grassroots organisations. In the ensuing discussions, a framework was co-created; it proposes a vision for policy and practice that can support a transformative urban recovery (TUR).

The framework is rooted in the priorities and experiences of urban practitioners and key stakeholders during the pandemic. It emphasises tackling multiple forms of exclusion and focuses on informal settlements and informal labourers during the recovery phase. As indicated in Figure 1, the framework recognises the pivotal role of equitable national and local government processes; advocates for the incorporation of marginalised groups into these processes; and prioritises the delivery of interconnected services and infrastructure.

With appropriate support and political will, we believe that this framework can respond to the pandemic's interrelated challenges in cities and towns and catalyse opportunities for transformative urban change.

Looking ahead

An IIED paper proposing the framework was published in June, titled '**Better cities after COVID-19**'. To share and build on this thinking, we are partnering with Cities Alliance, WIEGO, SDI, ICLEI and the Coalition for Urban Transitions to host internal thematic meetings and events in key urban policy spaces, including COP26 and the World Urban Forum. We welcome input and exchange with others.



Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.

6 Support inclusive, gender-transformative responses co-produced with marginalised groups

including women and girls, people with disabilities, youth, LGBTQI residents, racial minorities and others at heightened risk of severe disease or discrimination.

7 Include migrants, refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in pandemic assistance.

The legal status of urban migrants, refugees and IDPs presents specific challenges in accessing basic services, with many being excluded from official support during COVID-19.

8 Implement holistic interventions to improve the wellbeing of residents of informal settlements by:

strengthening livelihoods, upgrading informal settlements, developing adaptive social protection measures and enhancing key services.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

This is a critical moment for the evolution of cities, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) hit hard by COVID-19. LMICs' urban areas need recovery plans that respond to the pandemic's ongoing health, economic and social burdens; tackle urban poverty and other pre-existing inequalities exacerbated by COVID-19; and promote resilience. Collaboration and a shared vision will be essential to making progress on these interconnected challenges, which must be addressed in the context of global economic downturn, overseas aid cuts and reduced municipal budgets. To advance equitable and farsighted responses, IIED has brought together international agencies, researchers and civil society in the global South to co-create a framework that can guide transformative urban recovery processes.

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FIND OUT MORE

Our work on COVID-19 is being undertaken as part of the Transformative Urban Recovery programme run by IIED's Human Settlements Group and partners WIEGO, SDI, Cities Alliance, ICLEI and the Coalition for Urban Transitions. Together, we are promoting equitable, inclusive, sustainable and resilient urban development. Find out more at www.iied.org/framework-for-transformative-urban-recovery