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SA Future Economy

Supporting Resilient Social Contracts in Times of Crisis: Emerging Lessons from COVID-19

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Executive Summary

COVID-19 has brought crisis to the doorstep of every country in the world, spotlighting political incoherence and failed policy visions, deep vulnerabilities of systems and institutions across sectors, and polarised state and societal relations. This is occurring in underdeveloped and developed countries alike. At the same time, there is growing awareness that such crises also create opportunities to refashion the rules of the game in transformative ways.

This paper unpacks the question of how COVID-19 and the crisis-driven responses to address the pandemic can contribute to wider national goals relating to forging or strengthening national social contracts – that tie bold new policy visions to robust and resilient systems and institutional arrangements, that transform harmful structural legacies and strengthen social contracts – that can adapt, evolve and sustain in the face of crisis, and that hold promise for ever-greater levels of well-being for all in society. To investigate this topic, the paper first introduces the discussion of building back better from crisis, and how social contract framing can support these aims. Two sets of cases and evidence are then considered: what drives resilient social contracts on the one hand, and what drives successful COVID-19 responses on the other. A synthesis analysis of how the two can be pursued simultaneously is then put forth.

As part of a multi-researcher set of studies reflecting on South Africa's post-COVID-19 recovery, the analysis draws insights from selected cases for South Africa, with wider value for countries affected by fragility and fraught transitions. South Africa features in reflections from a nine-country study examining the drivers of resilient social contracts that took place from 2016-2019, and contemporary analysis of factors driving effective COVID-19 responses. A review of mounting global evidence on COVID-19 response efforts is then assessed. Particular attention is given to South Africa, the United States and South Korea – countries that are generally considered, respectively, to be having mixed results, not doing well, and excelling.

While analysis abounds on what policy approaches should drive post-COVID-19 economic recovery and development in South Africa and beyond, this paper's value should be viewed in terms of its synthesis framing to support integrated, adaptive thinking and policy design for building back better across sectors, systems and levels, and forging or strengthening resilient social contracts. The central argument of the paper is that efforts to recover from COVID-19 in transformative ways will

both support and be supported by efforts to forge resilient national social contracts. Further, the paper suggests that, while the South African government regularly utilises a "social compact" to frame policy approaches, the focus generally is often narrow, i.e. on economic recovery; the concept should rather be utilised to engage with a wider set of stakeholders strategically and inclusively and with a more integrated set of issues that are needed to guide transformative policy direction and its effective implementation.

The following recommendations target South African policymakers and senior policy planners, but have wider relevance for governments, societal stakeholders and international actors working towards this goal. They should inspire deeper multi-stakeholder conversations on appropriate, targeted forms of implementation.

Recommendations for South Africa

Tie crisis compacts to broader national visions and policy frameworks that target vulnerabilities and transform structural legacies:

Seize opportunities to develop and implement bold new policy visions

- *Bold new national policy visions should engage critically with global leadership calls for refashioning global institutions and policies towards more transformative, fair and inclusive economic and development models, as depicted in the visions underpinning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their promise to 'Leave no one Behind'. This movement acknowledges our interdependent vulnerabilities, that "no-one is safe until everyone is safe", and is guided by a more holistic view of threats to our collective human and environmental security.*
- *Policymakers must utilise the political capital offered by the crisis to cohere a national vision and tie this to existing policy plans – including the National Development Plan (NDP) and the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan – but with openness to their evolution in ways that bring a deeply divided society together and build genuine buy-in across sectors, social groups and levels of the population. The approaches need to better tackle multi-dimensional risks and vulnerabilities, notably the causes of corruption and inequality, while critically prioritising environmental and ecological sustainability.*

Place multi-dimensional risk and vulnerability analysis at the centre of policy, planning and emergency response efforts

- *In addition to scaling up urgent action on social protection, a multi-sector and stakeholder hub on vulnerability and risk data and analysis should be developed, harnessing and building upon existing efforts towards 1) ensuring greater public access to vital information, and 2) consolidating information to inform policy and practice. Capacities and systems to utilise this data across programming and levels must be enhanced.*
- *Development plans and sectoral strategies at all levels need to infuse crisis management and prevention priorities and approaches – relating to various types of disaster, especially climate change. The review of the NDP and an annual update of municipal Integrated Development Plans offer opportunities to do this; resources and technical capacities should be made available to*

support these processes. Even with recession and budget cuts in play, ensuring strong inclusion in policy making is a foundation for a resilient social contract.

Create effective crisis platforms, resilient health systems and coherent and transformative institutional arrangements:

Develop participatory governance and crisis-response platforms that foster a sense of inclusion and ownership of vision and strategy development, as well as implementation and accountability

- *Government should develop a process to cultivate deeper national dialogue on the country's direction moving beyond existing compacting exercises, which often have limited stakeholders who are unable to transcend their particular interests and lead South Africa out polarized policy visions. This likely means moving beyond the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), or restructuring it profoundly. Civil society will need its own dialogue to agree on representation.*
- *National dialogue needs to occur in a bottom-up manner to build a sense of inclusion and belonging. South Africa's has sub-national administrative and governance structures, but these drastically need revitalisation and resourcing to better serve the goals of achieving a social compact – i.e. to support collective analysis of and dialogue on how to address local challenges, risks and vulnerabilities, collaboration in the production of integrated development plans (IDPs), rolling out effective and fair service delivery, and promoting government accountability.*

Employ a resilience lens to transform health systems and engage with the capacities of communities more fully

- *Resilient systems must be built upon awareness of how multi-dimensional risks and structural drivers of conflict and fragility will influence vulnerabilities and the responsiveness and performance of systems. Capacity development is needed in these areas, and to support better coordination, integration and policy implementation. To radically uproot rampant corruption within government institutions and to protect resources for the public good, structural causes need tackling. This includes separating political appointments from operational activities involving resources, and closing loopholes and developing procurement and spending oversight mechanisms, i.e. in the administration of the COVID-19 financial stimulus.*
- *Government should share the epidemiological facts of COVID-19 and other diseases with communities and community-based organisations, as these have deeper insight into local priorities. They should be capacitated as needed to design context-appropriate (and gender- and minority-group sensitive) approaches to control and prevent the spread of the virus.*

Place social cohesion at the centre of policy design and implementation:

Build trust and pursue social cohesion by addressing the root causes of conflict, fragility and vulnerability, and employing conflict sensitivity in policy and programming

- *High levels of inequality (objective and subjective impressions of) are tied to levels of social cohesion. Efforts to take forward a new social cohesion strategy thus need to be located at high strategic levels, i.e. in the President's Office, and mainstreamed through policy and programming with attention to conflict sensitivity – factoring an analysis of conflict and fragility into the Department of Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation, and across sectoral strategies. This*

should support and deepen a risk and vulnerability lens, facilitating pathways out of polarisation while healing historical trauma affecting the everyday lives of all South Africans.

- *Trust in institutions is directly tied to consensual, not coerced, compliance. This is vital in crisis settings, and in forging resilient state-society social contracts. In addition to addressing corruption, building societal trust in the police is paramount – demanding more engagement with communities (i.e. through community policing) and improving police accountability and image integrity, i.e. breaking codes of silence and holding violators accountable.*
- *Building trust, inclusion and belonging through more regular, accurate and compassionate communication with the public is vital. Citizens, especially marginalised communities and social groups, deserve enhanced mechanisms to express their voice, needs and interests. Policymakers need to identify trusted institutions to facilitate dialogue to improve communication with communities, and to explore innovative mediums, including through technology, to better respond to local needs while shaping a care-based social contract.*

1. Introduction: COVID-19, Building Back Better and Resilient Social Contracts

COVID-19 as a multi-dimensional global pandemic is testing the viability of social contracts across states and societies nationally and at the global level. It is revealing the deep flaws and failures of policy visions that should sustain the environment and human livelihoods, the fragility of institutions across sectors, and the profound incapacities of states to harness societal compliance where trust and a sense of national belonging and inclusion have not been cultivated effectively. The pandemic is spotlighting the failures of governments to act in coordinated, coherent ways, both internally and internationally (Erasmus and Hartzenberg 2020; OECD 2020a, 2), amidst a growing questioning of the principles of multilateralism and disregard for our interdependencies. The profound inequalities within and between countries have been revealed more starkly as the pandemic and its effects attack poor and marginalised people and communities most severely – those least able to tackle them (OECD 2020a; Sachs 2020; Schwoebel and McCandless 2020).

At the same time, this 'critical juncture' offers opportunities to reassess and rework the rules of the game (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012), i.e. to radically transform collective visions, agreements and failing systems and institutions, to uproot bad leadership and to usher in new talent (Harding 2020). The United Nations (UN) Secretary General, António Guterres, argued in his speech for the 2020 Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture that there is a need for a "new social contract for a new era" – one targeting inequality, notably in our global institutions and with a view to fairer globalisation. The Financial Times (2020) has similarly called for a 'reset' of our frail, global social contract.

For those seeking to influence change, the context of the crisis offers high levels of public expenditure, with flexible fiscal frameworks, and a rising willingness to motivate the adoption of new development models. It is being proven that behavioural change is possible, and that coordinated global action is required to address risks that affect everyone (OECD 2020b, 3). At the same time, as the crisis has revealed, it can foster inward-looking dynamics. Either way, societies globally are paying attention, and viewing themselves as deeply invested in the outcomes.

A growing movement of policymakers and thought influencers are demanding that we "build back better" from COVID-19. As coined in the Sendai Framework for 2015 to 2030, this means utilising disaster as a trigger to build greater resilience in society around disaster preparedness, and through the recovery and reconstruction process (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNISDR] 2015). Broadening in use through COVID-19, building back better now suggests the need to understand complexity, apply evidence-based and risk-informed analysis, and pursue policy and institutional coherence and coordination towards transformative ends. Building back better in

the COVID-19 context is being tied to the need to address the underlying causes of vulnerability, conflict and fragility – including inequality, weak governance, and degradation of the environment (Guterres 2020b; OECD 2020a, 2020c; Schwoebel and McCandless 2020). New social contracts that harness interdependencies (Veglio 2020) and foster inclusion to build more coherent societies (Guterres 2020a, 2020b; Hussen 2020) are part of this. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework to guide post-COVID recovery are gaining momentum, as the view is that this universal agenda provides a transformative and sustainable development path (Guterres 2020a; OECD 2020a), although critical perspectives suggest they do not go far enough and, at the core, remain an economic growth model (McCandless 2016; Eisenmenger et al. 2020).

Cognisant of the challenges and opportunities being unearthed by the pandemic, this paper asks the question: How can COVID-19 responses support building back better and, in the process, strengthen national, resilient social contracts? At the most basic level, a social contract is a "a dynamic agreement between state and society, including different groups in society, on how to live together" (McCandless et al. 2018, 10). While the term can be used descriptively, normatively and heuristically (UNDP and NOREF 2016), this analysis engages the latter two uses as a conceptual tool to aid analysis, and as something that is aspirational: to build back better we need social contracts that are resilient, adapting, evolving and sustaining in ways that transform in the face of crisis, and that hold promise for ever-greater levels of well-being for all in society (McCandless et al. 2018).

In the light of this, social contracts go well beyond the notion of the social compacts often used by governments, including that of South Africa, to convey pacts between key stakeholders – notably government, business, labour and civil society – on key development priorities or sectoral issues (Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection [MISTRA] 2014). This conceptualisation also moves beyond the common, classical understandings of the social contract as agreement reflecting the mutual rights and responsibilities of states and society, with necessary trade-offs between rights and freedoms. This is because social contracts in crisis build upon efforts by scholars and policymakers to explore the concept's utility in contexts of conflict, fragility, and a fraught transition (OECD 2008; Kaplan 2017; UNDP 2016; McCandless et al. 2018). Such contracts are resilient not just in the minimalist sense of adapting or weathering a crisis, but because they allow for adaptive responses to crisis (Zahar and McCandless 2020), where political and social actors are better able to "steer social and political change in ways that may contribute to transforming conflict structures and fostering shared benefits of peace and development" (McCandless and Simpson 2015, 3).

These are important questions for South Africa, where one would be hard pressed to find an objector to the notion that building back better must inspire and guide thinking and practice beyond the pandemic. The economy is in deep crisis, with increasing inequality and rising poverty and debt, alongside a spiralling loss of jobs, all exacerbated, profoundly, by the COVID-19 lockdown. The nation is deeply divided across political and social, and racial and class realms, as the capacity of the state to deliver services fails to improve, and corruption reigns, despite attempts to halt and transform state capture. While President Ramaphosa has consistently used the notion of a 'social compact' to frame his efforts for post-COVID economic recovery, many believe that a transformative vision to tie COVID-19 recovery to building back better, in ways that meet needs while addressing structural legacies, promote social cohesion and societal stability, and place the country on a path to environmental resilience, are lacking (Creamer 2020; Hartford 2020a).

The paper now draws upon two sets of cases and evidence to build an argument and develop recommendations for how South Africa and other countries can engage in crisis compacting towards building back better with an eye to forging and strengthening resilient social contracts. The next section explores what drives resilient social contracts. This is followed by analysis of what drives successful COVID-19 responses – or 'crisis compacting'. A synthesis analysis and framing of these two is then offered.

2. Drivers of Resilient Social Contracts and Effective COVID-19 Response

2.1 Forging resilient social contracts

How are resilient social contracts forged and maintained in our complex world? A nine-country research and policy dialogue project (from 2016 to 2018) addressed this question, focusing on countries emerging from conflict, fragility and authoritarianism: South Africa, Zimbabwe, South Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen, Nepal, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Cyprus and Colombia.[1] Three 'drivers' of resilient social contracts – as conceptualised above – were postulated in the research (McCandless et al. 2018) as:

1. *political settlements addressing core issues of conflict in increasingly inclusive ways;*
2. *institutions delivering fairly and effectively; and*
3. *social cohesion broadening and deepening.*

The research findings, and policy and scholar dialogues around them, broadly validated the importance of these drivers. Several other findings stood out:

- *The reasons for fraught transitions often lie in the failure to effectively tie political settlements to institutional commitments and mechanisms to address them in inclusive ways that enable the transforming of core issues of conflict.*

This occurred across case countries where transitional mechanisms were missing, deeply ineffective, or veered from agreed mandates (Cyprus, Nepal, Zimbabwe), or where transitional agreements embraced competing concessions. In South Africa, provisions were made to protect white-owned businesses and individual property rights, trumping radical land and resource distribution and wider group rights (as embraced in the ANC's Freedom Charter). These trends, along with state capture of institutions by post-transition governments, undermined the state's ability to address the structural legacies of the apartheid era and to create a framework capable of realising a national vision (Ndinga-Kanga et al. 2020).

Across all countries, core issues of conflict and division were addressed ineffectually through these processes (McCandless 2020; McCandless et al. 2018). As reflected in the 2016 UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions (A/RES/70/262 and RES/2282), there is wide policy consensus that addressing the root causes of conflict, or alternatively grievances, is a prerequisite for sustaining peace.

- *State institutions regularly fail to deliver on their mandates, especially the needed integration across sub-national structures and systems; protests are an expression of societal dissatisfaction with failure of service delivery and lack of government accountability, as well as lack of faith in governance and grievance recourse mechanisms.*

Across all studies, the states did not effectively deliver services, whether for lack of capacity and resources, or corruption or state capture (McCandless et al. 2018). Protests about these issues have occurred in all countries studied. South Africa's flourishing protest movements can be viewed as pushing the boundaries of the political settlement to become more inclusive, demanding that it speaks better to the realities and needs of ordinary people (Ndinga-Kanga et al. 2020, 37).

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[1] *An esteemed international advisory group supported this work, directed by the author (see www.socialcontractsforpeace.org). Case studies were led by national authors.*

More importantly, protests and other resistance measures can indicate that societal expectations of the social contract are not being met, and show society's capacity and willingness to make demands upon the state. Whether a resilient social contract arises, however, depends upon the state's response. State violence in responding to protest has resulted in civic outcry (South Africa, Nepal, Tunisia), or fear of protesting (Bosnia and Hercegovina, Zimbabwe) (McCandless et al. 2018).

- *Social cohesion is deeply connected to progress in the areas of inclusive political settlements addressing core issues of conflict, and institutions delivering fairly and effectively.*

All the studied countries indicated that legacies of state formation, and poor progress in achieving an inclusive political settlement (driver 1) and in providing fair service delivery (driver 2) affected vertical cohesion. Also, horizontal intergroup cohesion tends to be negatively affected by polarising political dynamics and non-inclusive governance processes (McCandless et al. 2018, 54).

In South Africa, the unifying "rainbow nation" identity that accompanied the end of apartheid and held promise for greater social cohesion did not flourish amidst poor progress on righting the deeply unequal distribution of services across racial, class and gender lines (Ndinga-Kanga et al. 2020).

- *While the international community supports countries in these contexts in many vital ways, their positioning often undermines the ability to address core issues of conflict and to forge state-society social contracts.*

Despite the varied, supportive ways in which international actors influence the forging of national social contracts, they also can undermine these efforts. A concerning trend involves agreements that governments reach with international financial institutions (IFIs) – notably the World Bank and International Monetary Fund – that have undermined the ability of national actors to realise agreements, i.e. around the economy, that would cause political settlements to become increasingly inclusive and address core issues of conflict.

Tunisia had a home-grown, bottom-up revolution with an impressive civil society coalition facilitating key aspects of the transition process (Mahmoud and Ó Súilleabháin 2020). A decade on, however, severe economic challenges compromise the country's ability to actualise its widely-owned national vision. While some say that a core challenge is transforming the rentier dimensions of the state (Cammack et al. 2017), civil society groups and labour unions point to the need to break from the rules of the game, which are embedded in IFI policy prescriptions that lack context sensitivity and inclusion (Taboubi 2019). Similar historical experiences and concerns exist in many of the countries.

The study ultimately underscored the importance of these drivers, and their mutually reinforcing nature, in forging and achieving resilient social contracts.

2.2 COVID-19 response and success – what are we learning?

Countries that are doing well in their responses to tackling COVID-19 logically have more immediate opportunities to build back better across sectors, systems and levels, and to strengthen resilient social contracts. South Korea absorbed lessons from the 2015 MERS outbreak, transforming its disease-prevention legislation. It developed early warning and rapid diagnosis and response capacities, and increased transparency in its communications with society (Kim 2020; Kwon 2020; Normile 2020; Oh et al. 2020; Thompson 2020). It is widely considered, amongst a number of others, such as Iceland, Vietnam and New Zealand, to be a success story in combatting COVID-19 to date.

While historical and social contexts undoubtedly shape the nature of responses and outcomes, understanding factors driving effective COVID-19 responses across countries can support the drawing of lessons. Such analysis is flourishing, with many theories vying to explain success. Box 1, and the narrative analysis that follows, present nine commonly cited success factors derived from a wide array of evidence-based studies and reflections. The analysis then focuses on three countries commonly cited as excelling (South Korea), not doing well (the USA), and having mixed results (South Africa). While there is no consensus on which data are most telling for COVID analysis, Table 1 illustrates the significant variance across the three cases in terms of numbers/proportion of national cases and deaths per million, which informed this case selection.

Table 1: COVID-19 comparative data: USA, South Africa, South Korea					
	Cases per million	Active cases	Deaths per million	Tests per million	Population
USA	22 044	5 591 872	485.5	1 444 026	332 775 543
South Africa	6 296	1 669 231	944	194 497	59 990 356
South Korea	269	140 799	38	190 966	51 271 690

Source: McCandless, derived from https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries [accessed 1.6.2021]

Examining the cases, it is clear that South Korea and the USA reveal stark differences across these factors and numbers. South Korea is lauded for early recognition, innovative and science-led responses, along with rapid action across well-coordinated spheres and levels of government (Bremmer 2000; Lee and Lee 2020; Levkowitz 2020; Normile 2020; Oh et al. 2000; Yoo et al. 2020). Conversely, the entire government response confronted political fragmentation across agencies and structures in the USA, which has been widely critiqued for divisive, ideologically based responses, putting politics ahead of public health. It has also been said to account for slow action and the pandemic's rapid growth in the country (Friedman 2020; Fukuyama 2020; Thompson 2020).

While both South Korea and the USA developed economic stimulus plans and multi-dimensional packages to address vulnerable populations, South Korea's universal health care, with generous crisis provisions, is credited with minimising the financial burden for all (Kwon 2020). Its top-rated healthcare system separates COVID and non-COVID efforts, developing triage centres down to the district level (Oh et al. 2020).

Box 1: Nine factors explaining an effective COVID-19 response

- *Early recognition and action* – i.e. mapping the spread of the virus, testing massively and rapidly, tracing and quarantining (Al Jazeera 2020; Bremmer 2020; OECD 2020d; Oh et al. 2020; Thompson 2020). The rate at which states have adopted stringent measures has played "a critical role in stemming the infection" (University of Oxford 2020).

- *Science-based leadership* – i.e. applying science at the highest levels of decision-making (Al Jazeera 2020; Blackburn and Ruyle 2020; INGSA and Koi Tū Centre for Informed Futures 2020; Plohl and Musil 2020; Ramalingam et al. 2020).

- *Economic stimulus packages* – i.e. including providing safety nets for businesses and vulnerable populations (Bremmer 2020; OECD 2020a).

- *Targeting vulnerable populations* – i.e. at all levels of government, through safety nets, grants and well-designed stimulus packages capable of achieving their intended impact (OECD 2020a;

Van den Heever 2020b).

- *Effective government coordination – i.e. fit-for-purpose crisis platforms; coordination from centre of government and whole-of-government response; effectively and transparently engaging with sub-national levels and key stakeholders through the use of different media, including mass media, social media and technology; policy coherence (Bremmer 2020; Kwon 2020; OECD 2020a, 2020b; Oh et al. 2020; Van den Heever 2020b).*

- *Strong capacity of the health system – i.e. ability to conduct widespread and extensive contract tracing, testing, isolation and quarantine; high numbers of intensive care beds and trained healthcare workers (Bremmer, 2020; Oh et al. 2020).*

- *Transparency and effective government communication with public – i.e. transparency, consistency and use of different media, including mass media, social media and technology (Bremmer 2020; Kwon 2020; Levkowitz 2020; Van den Heever 2020b).*

- *Trust in government and voluntary societal compliance – i.e. high levels of voluntary compliance with government crisis dictates; society-driven or bottom-up efforts (Al Jazeera 2020; Oh et al. 2020; Kim 2020; Van den Heever 2020b). Higher levels of trust in government (Bargain and Aminjonov 2020) and in science (Plohl and Musil 2020)[2] correlate with higher levels of compliance.*

- *Security sector respecting human rights – the responsibility of states; heavy-handed security may flatten the curve in the immediate term, but will undermine trust in and legitimacy of government and respect for law, which link to societal compliance (Bargain and Aminjonov 2020; Kasambala 2020; McCandless and Miller 2020; Sambala et al. 2020).*

Source: authors' review

Compliance has been stronger in South Korea and is tied to transparent information sharing and the use of technology – even surveillance – for effective community engagement (Kwon 2020; Levkowitz 2020). In the USA, media polarisation and the propagation of fake news are common (Mitchell and Oliphant 2020), and the government has propagated confusion around the value of compliance. Surveys point to low levels of understanding of the government's approach and a lack of trust in the leaders' handling of the situation (Freeman et al. 2020).

South Africa also took rapid action, taking productive steps to address the adverse effects of the pandemic, including engaging with top scientists and stakeholders in crafting the initial public policy responses (Devermont and Mukulu, 2020; Gavin 2020). As it has done traditionally, it applied the discourse of a social compact across sectors. Online resource portals were developed to enhance transparency. A stimulus package (R500 billion, or 10% of GDP) was introduced, targeting hunger and social distress, and offering support for companies and workers.

However, fissures in the approach soon materialised. Scientists publicly attacked the process, demanding transparency, as government kept their advice hidden (Cowen et al. 2020). Lockdown regulations were deeply contested, and critiqued for incoherence and insufficient explanation and warning (Alex van der Heever, personal communication, October 29, 2020; Cowen et al. 2020). Other cited issues included poor government coordination across provinces, private sector testing strategies, polarised agendas, clumsy messaging (Costa 2020; Gavin 2020; Heywood 2020a; Harding 2020; Makgale 2020) and heavy-handed security sector responses, primarily in black townships

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[2]*Those higher on religious orthodoxy, political conservativism and conspiracy ideation trust science less and comply less (Plohl and Musil 2020, 9).*

(Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2020; McCandless and Miller 2020). This was followed by high levels of non-compliance (Cairncross and Gillespie 2020; South African Government 2020), while the longer-term effects of some three million people losing work during the crisis hold painful implications for the pre-existing stark, unequal, spatial and racial geographies. As is common elsewhere, the vulnerable were hit the hardest: the harshest employment declines occurred in populations that are poor, unskilled and less educated, rural and female (Spaull et al. 2020).

The initially praised government stimulus package was roundly critiqued for amounting to a net increase in non-interest spending of less than 1% of GDP, and pursuing austerity measures cutting back on essential government programmes (Budget Justice Coalition [BJC] 2020; Heywood 2020a; IEJ 2020), and the supplementary budget of R21.5 million, for lacking a spending strategy (Van den Heever 2020c). Interventions to pump money into vulnerable households were undermined by the lack of registration processes and poor local data (Alex van den Heever, personal communication, 9 October 2020; Moore et al. 2020;). On a positive note, the recovery strategy's Caregiver Grant, affecting one-third of the country (98% of recipients are women), has been renewed, largely because of strong pressure from civil society (Activists for Women and Children 2020).

Government coordination also came into the spotlight, with the National Coordinating Command Council (NCCC) – an ad hoc structure established to lead the crisis response – deeply criticised for circumventing and displacing constitutional, parliamentary and legal instruments and process oversight, ultimately creating space for the abuse of state power (Erasmus and Hartzenberg 2020; Legalbrief 2020; Van den Heever 2020a). Corruption in supply and distribution processes was rampant; 2/3 of contracts have come under investigation, with public outcry over an ongoing display of impunity (February 2020a, 2020b; Merton 2020, Van den Heever 2020a). Platforms for participation were considered woefully inadequate, and collective statements by academics and civil society providing analysis and recommendations to address the pandemic were not taken seriously by government (Heywood 2020a, 2020b; Patrick Bond, interview, August 2, 2020).

The government's premier dialogue mechanism for achieving a social compact – the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC)[3] – sought to build dialogue around a COVID-19 response. This gave rise to the government's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, targeting jobs, industrialisation, and crime and corruption. These were not surprising priorities when considering the importance placed on them by South Africans, as a recent survey suggests; the top worry is unemployment (59%) and the bottom is COVID-19 (24%) (BusinessTech 2021). However, this plan has also received criticism – it offers nothing new, effectively reiterates plans that have failed to be implemented to date and, critically, offers no insight into how to tackle the humanitarian crisis (Mathe 2020).

Despite its own view of its many successes (NEDLAC 2016), many argue that it has not achieved its goals of achieving a social compact over time – to achieve real consensus on a development path between government, labour, business and community organisations in South Africa. Its failures are deemed to be the result of exclusivist representation – viewed, e.g., as an elite club of big business, big labour, and big government – of the labour, trade and industry ministries (Hartford 2020b), and because of the deep distrust of stakeholders vis-à-vis the government. Others point to its failure to link efforts to a national vision, its undermining of a sense of belonging (MISTRA 2014, 9), and a lack of government capacity to implement agreements (Gumede 2012). These are important lessons when reflecting on what works, and what doesn't, in a social compact.

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[3]NEDLAC was set up in 1994 in an early act of the new post-apartheid parliament to advance dialogue in the public interest.

The capacity of the state to take quick action, particularly through its health sector, clearly matters. Yet it is not everything, as Figure 1 illustrates; the US has similar levels of human development, adjusted for inequality, as South Korea. While the US has strong institutional capacity, effective delivery requires strong leadership and government coordination to enable the harnessing of a national vision behind which citizens can rally in a unified way.
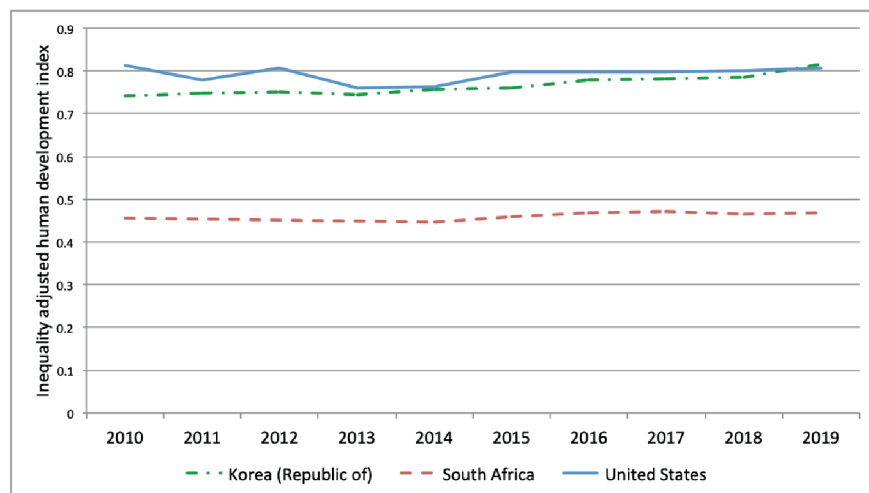

Figure 1: Inequality-adjusted human development index
Source: UNDP (2021)

Science-based leadership when confronting a pandemic is vital, but employing it effectively requires more – government and societal buy-in and compliance with its dictates. South Korea's ability to elicit compliance ensured that the country did not have to shut down its economy (Van den Heever 2020b).

Effective early action requires being sensitive to contexts. In South Africa, full compliance was never feasible in the high-density townships and informal settlements, where people often live in extreme proximity (preventing social distancing) and 56% of the population does not have a tap (preventing regular handwashing) (Magongo et al. 2020; Patrick Bond, personal communication, August 2, 2020; Van den Heever 2020b). South Africa is hardly unique; in sub-Saharan Africa, some 57% of urban residents live in slums (World Bank 2020). While South Africa, South Korea and the US put forth stimulus packages, many countries cannot afford this.

At a basic level, as argued by Tedros Adhanom, director of the World Health Organization (WHO), effective responses require leaders taking action, and citizens embracing key measures.[4] This suggests that, at the heart of responding effectively, are quality social contracts. It is clear from the US how societal polarisation undermines effective responses. This is reflected by citizens who are willing to risk their lives to protest against lockdown regulations – some because they do not believe how the pandemic spreads, and others to address the country's structural legacies of racial injustice.

Unaddressed structural legacies, or "prior constraints" (South African Technology Network [SATN] 2020, 17), can undo good intentions and plans to do things differently in a crisis response. In the case of South Africa, despite strong leadership at the top, corruption and cronyism, mixed with economic stagnation, have left hollowed-out, weak institutions and a bloated civil (public) service (February 2020a; Gumede 2020; Harding 2020; Makgale 2020), and "shallow and technocratic" mechanisms of public participation (February 2020a). Other constraints and legacies include extreme horizontal inequalities, fragile media-government relations (Mkhize 2018; Makgale 2020), low levels of trust

in government (Afrobarometer 2018; Edelman 2020), and a low sense of South African identity or belonging. A deep economic crisis was also in place prior to the start of the pandemic.

It is clear that COVID-19 is a threat multiplier, exacerbating structural legacies and intensifying contemporary socio-economic and political challenges. The above analysis suggests lessons to inform the framing of and priorities for building back better in transformative ways that strengthen and support resilient and inclusive social contracts.

3. Lessons and Insights for Strengthening Social Contracts in Times of Crisis

As evident from the above, inclusive political settlements, well-functioning institutions and social cohesion can be considered drivers of resilient social contracts. An effective crisis response, while bringing new contextual imperatives to the forefront, unveils the importance of similar priorities that should inform framing and actions. This section merges the 'three drivers' of framing a resilient social contract with a crisis (COVID-19) lens to revitalise and improve thinking, policy and practice.

3.1 Three synthesis-framing priorities

The three synthesis-framing priorities involve the need to:

Tie crisis compacts to broader national visions and policy frameworks that target vulnerabilities and transform structural legacies

At its core, building back better suggests tying crisis response efforts (and the associated social compacts) to wider, transformative national (and regional and global) visions and agreements. Centrally, and as illustrated in the preceding case analyses, pre-existing structural legacies and core issues dividing societies hold great potential to unravel strident efforts to do things differently, and better. Placing vulnerability and risk analysis at the heart of planning and implementation from the outset will support the realisation of more robust, inclusive and transformative national visions, and these need to be tied to fit-for-purpose policy frameworks.

Crisis offers new opportunities to reset the rules of the game at different levels. Addressing inequality and other forms of vulnerability requires restructuring the rules, norms and institutions of the political economy. While this is the right thing to do ethically, other compelling reasons are clear. It is demanded by the common threats to our environmental and human security (McCandless and Trautner 2020). People will not cultivate a sense of trust in the state and belonging if they are left out of development. The SDGs and their transformative pledge to Leave no one Behind offer a vision for this. While there are many political obstacles to their realisation, the opportunities offered by the crisis to advance them, as described in the introduction, should be seized.

Create effective crisis platforms, resilient health systems and coherent and transformative institutional arrangements

How can crisis-driven governance structures and platforms provide opportunities to transform stagnant, weak or corrupt institutions and processes into more adaptive[6] and evidence-based leadership approaches? As both sets of analyses reveal, this needs to be the focus of stakeholders in

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[6] *Adaptive leadership – the ability to collectively identify the effects of interventions (and their combinations) – is gaining traction as a method to manage disease outbreaks (Ramalingam et al. 2020, 3).*

dialogue, to include civil society and private sector partners who collectively identify challenges and priorities, mobilise resources, set, implement and monitor action plans, and build ownership of agreed national goals. Countries are experimenting, many successfully, with institutional arrangements to cultivate multi-level coordination bodies aimed at preventing fragmented responses (OECD 2020a). Regional issues and actors also need to be engaged with meaningfully to ensure transnational coherence and collaboration.

Resilient health systems entail awareness of the multi-dimensional risks and capacities in play, foster inclusion across mechanisms and institutions, and synergise responses across sectors and governance levels. Systems thinking is being employed to map and understand the supply, demand and contextual factors and their interactions to support resilient health systems. Often missed in the otherwise valuable WHO guidance for strengthening health systems (WHO 2010) is the need for an analysis of multi-dimensional risks, and how they will influence vulnerabilities and system performance (Papoulidis 2020a). Countries need dual capacities to address ongoing health services and the demands of crisis situations (Papoulidis 2020a; USAID and Measure Evaluation 2019). South Korea clearly understood this when crafting a COVID-19 response strategy that capitalised on its strong institutions.

While the literature tends to focus on coping and adapting dimensions of resilience, often critiqued for placing a burden on those affected by disasters and conflict, the transformative dimension is more suitable for addressing structural legacies and drivers of conflict and fragility (McCandless and Simpson 2015) and building back better. This is not uncomplicated, given the nature of international, transnational and domestic drivers intermixing in complex ways that must inform transformative resilience (McCandless 2019, 30).

Place social cohesion at the centre of policy design and implementation

Weak social cohesion is often correlated with poor economic growth and conflict, while strong social cohesion conversely is correlated with higher per capita income and employment levels (Agence Française de Développement [AFD] et al. 2018; UNDP 2020). At the heart of social cohesion across diverse conceptualisations and measures lies trust, without which societal compliance with realising stringent crisis response plans will be deeply challenged. As COVID-19 responses have illustrated, overly militarised approaches undermine trust in the state and its institutions, particularly when they are unevenly deployed across geographical spaces. This suggests a social contract of coercion rather than consent (HRW 2020; McCandless and Miller 2020; Sambala et al. 2020). Similarly, corruption breaks trust, and "the sacred contract between the people and their elected representatives is broken" (February 2020b).

Social cohesion should not be pursued in ways that reduce political challenges such as inequality and injustice to cultural explanations (Nkondo 2015; Abrahams 2016). This is precisely why the growth of social cohesion requires structural legacies that continue to divide people to be addressed, as is evident from the research above on social contracts (McCandless et al. 2018). In South Africa, for example, poverty, unemployment and service delivery protests are negatively correlated with social cohesion (AFD et al. 2018).

The rising polarisation between states and societies globally also illustrates the failure of governments to establish a social contract that suggests care for all of society.[7] Popular distrust of governments across Africa has fuelled self-reliance and innovation by communities at the local level (Wilén 2020). There are expansive social solidarity networks around the world (e.g. the People's Coalition 2020; The Detail 2020), meeting needs and nurturing the resilience of communities (McCandless and Miller

[7]Chendre Gould (interview, October 22, 2020) inspired the notion of care.
[8]This term describes how disagreements at the heart of conflict translate into political and legal institutions, which become the basis for continuing negotiation (Bell and Pospisil 2017).

2020). Engaging with and drawing upon these capacities in crafting national response strategies will support and increase government legitimacy and strengthen social contracts with society.

3.2 Implications for South Africa

President Ramaphosa has employed the language of social compact in the context of COVID-19, as he has often done in the past on policy issues, yet it has been narrowly tied to restructuring the economy to achieve inclusive growth (McCandless and Miller 2020). A host of critiques suggest there is little new in the President's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, which is rooted in austerity measures deemed to undermine social protection and transformation (Activists for Women and Children 2020; Gavin Hartford, personal communication, October 19, 2020; Patrick Bond, personal communication, August 2, 2020; Rashnee Atkinson, personal communication, October 28, 2020). The narrow framing does not tackle the multi-dimensional risks and areas of fragility that are being compounded by the pandemic, nor engage with the diversity of needs, everyday experiences and vulnerabilities of South Africans.

The crisis reveals fragilities in South Africa's formalised yet 'unsettled' political settlement[8] – which, over two and a half decades, has not sufficiently addressed the structural legacies to achieve the anticipated inclusive outcomes. A more inclusive settlement requires determined action to transform well-known 1) competing policy imperatives (at the heart of which, broadly, are economic growth and redistribution), and 2) continuing propensities and avenues for state capture and corruption. However, the mindboggling COVID-19-related looting of resources reveals that the government's efforts to address state capture are not yet making much everyday difference. Judith February argues that the President needs to take more radical, decisive action and spend the political capital offered by the crisis to transform the economy and governing institutions and, more radically, tackle government corruption (Gavin 2020). Merton (2020) observes: "what must be put right is the institutional and political culture that allows officials and the politically connected – as the saying goes – to chow." This requires tackling polarisation within the ANC, which would involve whether or not to protect high-level member from corruption charges, and what constitutes a suitable pathway for economic transformation (Booysen 2021). Environmental and ecological sustainability needs to be at the centre of a bold vision towards a green, inclusive future for all, while breaking down the walls of social division rooted in deep inequalities (Hartford 2020a).

More resilient and accountable institutions and effective coordination across government cannot be fashioned overnight, particularly in a crisis. Devising a coherent strategy for building back better nonetheless demands greater cohesion and capacity development across government (including making merit-based appointments), serious investment in improving data collection and analysis, and applying the data critically, at different levels of government (Chendre Gould, personal communication, October 22, 2020; Rashnee Atkinson, personal communication, October 28, 2020). It also demands a robust commitment to transparency, and more concerted, genuine and participatory societal engagement in deliberating about South Africa's democratic path (February 2020b).

Despite South Africa's myriad social cohesion policy efforts, this driver of a resilient social contract will unlikely grow until inclusive development outcomes, which are at the heart of a more socially integrated society, become more apparent. The ongoing assessment and development of a new social cohesion strategy (or "compact") is under way (as this paper was produced) and is confronting this challenge. While the 2012 National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and a Cohesive South African Society was driven by the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, a strong tide of concern in consultations for the new version has focused on poverty and inequality as key obstacles to

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[9] *Social cohesion lies within South Africa's NDP Vision 2030, and is one of seven government priorities (https://www.gov.za/issues/key-issues).*

social cohesion. Yet this is not something the department can tackle on its own. Stronger social cohesion also requires stronger trust in government and vis-à-vis other groups and citizens in society, and a sense of belonging and inclusion. Critically, the security sector demands attention and transformation: 2/3 of polled South Africans do not trust the police, and 50% view them as corrupt (Afrobarometer 2018). Greater trust and a sense of belonging will grow the legitimacy of government, and also greater voluntary compliance with government dictates when needed.

Building back better from COVID-19 is by all accounts a gargantuan task for governments, societies and communities, and for our international institutions. This analysis has sought to draw insight and evidence from studies on how resilient social contracts are forged, and on successful COVID-19 response efforts. The framing, analysis and recommendations seek to build upon scholarly and policy work focused on finding innovative pathways to address our common crisis and build back a better world. It is hoped that this analysis can contribute to the vital, collaborative movement of thought and action.

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INTERVIEWS

- Alex van den Heever, School of Governance, University of Witwatersrand, 1 August 2020 and 29 October 2020.
- Patrick Bond, University of the Western Cape School of Government, 2 August 2020.
- Chendre Gould, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 22 October 2020.
- Rashnee Atkinson, Housing Development Agency, National Department of Human Settlements. 28 October 2020.
- Gavin Hartford, Stakeholder Solutions, 19 October 2020.
- Gustavo de Carvalho, ISS, Institute for Security Studies, 5 September 2020.

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