



FORDFOUNDATION

Reimagine Recovery

A Playbook for an Equitable Future



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Introduction

Two years ago, our world changed forever. COVID-19 overwhelmed every facet of our societies, taking more than 6 million lives—and exacerbating crises of inequality, injustice, and intolerance for countless millions more.

In the wake of these intersecting crises, some global leaders were quick to simplify the idea of recovery to “relief”—and rightly so. How could we relieve our overworked, underfunded healthcare professionals? How could we relieve the suffering of everyday people as they lost jobs, loved ones, and faith in institutions? We wished fervently for a “post-COVID” future, a world relieved of grief and strife.

Today, we know that true recovery, let alone renewal, is far more complicated. Despite our hopes, COVID-19 is not a finite moment in our global past, but an urgent reality of our present—and, undoubtedly, our future. Moving from momentary relief to sustainable recovery and reform requires more than reckoning with the enduring nature of this crisis, its rippling variants, and its indeterminate end. Too much has been permanently upended, too many long-held beliefs disproved. COVID has stripped away old ideas and expectations and revealed the starkness of inequality around the world.

We cannot allow ourselves to resume what was; we must reimagine what can be. True recovery requires us to acknowledge the unjust structures and policies that, in many ways, led to and compounded the devastation of the pandemic. It calls for us to examine our obsession with the idea of rapid growth at all costs and establish a shared understanding of inclusive, sustainable growth that results in equal opportunity—and equitable outcomes. It demands us to recognize our global web of mutuality and come together to collectively address the problems ahead with humility and reciprocity. And it challenges us to realize a bold, hopeful reimagination of our social, economic, political and governance systems, with equity and interdependence at their core.

Reimagine Recovery: A Playbook for an Equitable Future offers a detailed vision of such recovery, beginning in the places we work and live and extending to our largest global stages. Like much of our work at the Ford Foundation, the playbook asks: What’s possible when everyone can fully participate in society and has the opportunity to shape their lives? What’s possible when we follow the lead of leaders and organizations building solutions for—and with—historically excluded communities? What’s possible when we shift our old ways of operating and include equity in our execution of every policy and cultivation of every movement?

What is possible, it turns out, is a fundamental reimagination of the way we work and live, and balance the two as a society—a restructuring that widens the path to active participation in a just economy, levels the playing field, and shores up the foundation of our global order, so that recovery begins with prioritizing our full, shared humanity and mutuality.

Taken together, the ideas and initiatives that follow call us to envision a new world, a world where all stakeholders are working in partnership toward sustainable development, where power and privilege are kept in check and social, economic and political opportunities are more evenly distributed, and where unnecessary conflict and oppression are a matter of the past so everyone can live a life of dignity.

Let this vision inspire us to work together to design responses that not only weather the worst, but allow us all to flourish and thrive, and define a new age of solidarity, connection and justice. It is my hope that this playbook—an exercise in imagination—contributes to a future of shared prosperity, guiding us along that path from relief, to recovery, renewal, and a reimagined world.



Darren Walker
President, Ford Foundation



REIMAGINE WORK

The scale of the economic challenge wrought by COVID-19 is catastrophic—and one the world hasn't faced in a century. As the pandemic magnifies the cracks in our broken economic systems, it's accelerating a long overdue reckoning about the future of work and our economy at large. For far too long, we, as a global society, have relied on an unsustainable way of working and business norms that maximize the wealth of the powerful and privileged, enabling an unbridled form of capitalism that has deepened inequality and reduced the power of working people.

Over the last few decades, corporations and governments have diminished worker power with stagnant, unfair wages, declining benefits, little to no social protections, and obstacles to unionization. More than half the global workforce operates without a formal contract or arrangement and vital protections such as health care, sick leave and child care, while 8% of workers live in extreme poverty. Without a social safety net, workers—particularly low-wage workers, immigrants, people of color, women and the disabled—have had little choice but to risk their lives, leading to increased exposure to poverty and COVID-19. Women, largely women of color, experienced a landmark departure from the global workforce, with 2.2 million out in the U.S. alone due to broken care systems.

In the face of these conditions, we've witnessed a historic act of refusal by workers, who are no longer accepting below standard wages and protections and calling for a more just economy. As the world re-emerges from COVID, we have a historic opportunity to build a global economy that works for all. By strengthening the rights of workers, investing in quality jobs at every level, and providing paths for historically excluded communities to play more meaningful roles in the economy, we can create truly inclusive economic systems and ensure everyone has an opportunity to prosper.

Make work more inclusive

To ensure equality of opportunity, all people—regardless of their ability, gender, race, or background—must have access to promising jobs with the possibility of growth, instead of being forced to accept low-paying positions without the benefits and protections they deserve.

While women make up half of the global population, only 47% are part of the workforce, compared to 72% of men. For those women who do work, they tend to be overrepresented in vulnerable, low-paying and undervalued occupations. Roughly 58% of working women worldwide engage in informal employment with few prospects or protections, a figure that rises to 92% in the Global South. Opening up more opportunities for women can add up to \$12 trillion to the global economy by 2025, but we need to support their growth by pushing for equal pay, eliminating discrimination and barriers to quality jobs, and providing them with the safeguards that keep them—and their jobs—protected during crises like COVID-19.

Historically people with disabilities have earned less, experienced a higher rate of unemployment, or have been left out of the workforce entirely. Accommodations such as the option to work from home were out of reach as many employers assumed remote work was unfeasible. Now that the pandemic has turned that thinking on its head, we must tap the incredible potential people with disabilities hold, and provide the benefits and protections they need to thrive. They make up 15% of the world's population so, without their contributions, we risk our



► The **Justice and Mobility Fund**, a \$250 million effort led by Ford and a number of philanthropies, is helping organizations like the **Vera Institute for Justice** and **Center for Employment Opportunities** scale solutions that will create economic opportunities for the millions ensnared by America's criminal justice system.

chances at accelerating recovery and building a new economy grounded in equity. Not only do they bring unique perspectives to the table, companies and organizations that champion inclusion outperform their peers, so inclusion needs to be seen as a priority with goals, measurement and accountability.

In the U.S., one in three people with criminal records struggle to access quality work, confronted with hurdles like employer stigma, discriminatory questions on applications, and restrictions on trade licenses. Companies can take immediate steps to be agents of change by adopting and advancing fair chance hiring and supporting skills building and job placement programs, so people with criminal records have a path toward economic mobility.

The benefits of inclusion are many. The sooner companies realize those benefits, unlock opportunities for workers at every level, and recognize those workers as partners, the sooner workers will see themselves as part of the company's success and invest in its growth—and the growth of the greater economy.

Strengthen rights & protections for workers

All working people must have equal rights to labor protections, access to social protections, and the opportunity to shape the policies and systems that affect their lives. Yet COVID fully exposed the inequalities in workers' rights and conditions, particularly in the Global South.

The global economy is fueled by informal workers: street vendors, domestic workers, piece-rate workers, day laborers, waste pickers and more. They make up 60% of the world's workforce—90% in the Global South—yet they have few rights, no benefits or protections, and barely make enough to support their families. Throughout the pandemic, they have been disproportionately exposed not just to the virus, but also to injustice and economic ruin.

For the economy to recover equitably, the collective power of these 2 billion workers needs to grow. On an international level, WIEGO is calling on governments to ensure informal workers, particularly women, are at the center of relief efforts, government assistance and economic stimulus programs. In the U.S., the Families and Workers Fund is reimagining America's public benefits system with partners in government, business, and the social sector.

The pandemic has underlined how vital workers, both formal and informal, are to an economic recovery. We must elevate their voices to ensure they have a say in their working conditions, and secure them a seat at the table alongside policymakers and business leaders, so they can be the center of solutions as we plan for the future.

Expand access to capital

Creating an inclusive economy means everyone has access to the capital and financial services they need to thrive. We must reimagine a form of capitalism that prioritizes purpose alongside profit and benefits multiple stakeholders—customers, employees, and communities—alongside shareholders.



- Care work makes all other work possible, but the issues around care have been invisible until the pandemic thrust them to the forefront. The **National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA)**, **Jobs With Justice**, and **Family Values at Work** among others have spent 20-plus years building a movement to support undervalued and underpaid care workers, domestic workers, and home health care aides who are overwhelmingly women, immigrants and people of color. The **Care for All with Respect and Equity Fund** is helping this movement redefine care in America, because care is essential for families and the economy to thrive.

When COVID-19 struck, millions of these workers lost their jobs and, given their informal and often immigrant status, had little to no access to government relief. Within weeks, NDWA launched the **Coronavirus Care Fund**, raising and distributing over \$30 million to 50,000 domestic workers through **Alia**, the first portable benefits platform. The platform helped NDWA advise over 12 cities and states on how to provide relief assistance for excluded workers.



For too long, women and other marginalized groups have lacked the resources to meaningfully participate in the modern economy—and the pandemic has only exacerbated the gaps in access. In the U.S., women and people of color control only 1% of the \$71 trillion in assets under management. Around the world, billions of people are underserved by traditional financial institutions and lack access to loans and savings opportunities that lead to economic prosperity.

At Ford, we have committed \$1 billion of our endowment to Mission Investments, an effort to provide capital to the industries and investors who need it the most. By teaming up with organizations like Equity Alliance, Fairview Capital, Illumen Capital, Plexo Capital, and the Black Venture Capital Consortium, we are diversifying the asset management industry, investing in businesses led by women and people of color, and advancing a more inclusive, impactful form of investing.

We need more businesses, investors and industries to recognize that if we create the context and conditions for an inclusive and just economy, the more we can unlock better ideas and outcomes for humankind.

► **The Connecticut State Treasurer's Corporate Call to Action**, which aims to harness the power of the financial sector in advancing justice, is helping expand access to financial services for low-income communities in the U.S. To date, the Corporate Call to Action has secured commitments from 18 of the world's leading financial institutions such as UBS, BlackRock and Morgan Stanley to drive \$30 billion worth of economic impact for businesses and communities of color, create 10,000 internships and development opportunities for Black and Latinx talent, and support the financial well-being of 30,000 people of color working in service sectors.





REIMAGINE LIFE

Social, economic and political systems and how they operate have a substantial effect on our personal welfare and happiness. Our rights and freedoms, our ability to access an education and quality health care, find economic success, and contribute to our community all impact life outcomes. Equality is only realized when everyone has the opportunity to make the most of their lives.

COVID-19 brought into sharp relief how inequality affects different aspects of life, from our ability to access life-saving vaccines to the technology that has kept us all connected. More importantly, it has reinforced what people who face the compounding effects of injustice everyday have been telling us for decades: inequality requires cross-cutting solutions because we are not single-issue individuals nor do we live single-issue lives.

To come out of this pandemic as a truly just society, we need to support the well-being of every individual and uplift the inherent dignity of all people.

Make vaccines accessible to all

It's now evident that worldwide access to the COVID vaccine offers the best hope of slowing the pandemic and saving lives. As an economic recovery begins to take hold in certain countries, we need to confront a greater fracturing between wealthy nations and lower-income countries, driven by starkly unequal access to vaccines and other essential drugs and treatments.

While wealthy nations drove vaccine development and are seeing their populations benefit, middle- to low-income nations—particularly in Africa, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe—are lagging needlessly behind. To date, the world's 30 poorest countries have only fully vaccinated roughly 2% of their populations. We cannot overcome the virus and its impacts



- **The People's Vaccine Alliance** is a coalition of over 80 organizations and networks supported by 130 global actors—including heads of states, health experts, economists, faith leaders, Nobel Laureates, and activists—working together to catalyze a people's vaccine, available free of charge to everyone, everywhere.

unless we address the widespread, deep-seated inequities that permeate global supply and distribution chains and tackle challenges of access and uptake to equip low-income countries for mass immunization campaigns.

The main driver behind vaccine inequity is an antiquated and unjust intellectual property system that commodifies vaccines. We need a dramatic rethink of this system and its rules, so we can expand manufacturing in more countries to increase production. To make vaccines a global public good, governments need to encourage a commitment to global health over country and company interests, and the pharmaceutical companies need to share technology and know-how to scale manufacturing in middle- and low-income countries.

We also need to support the development of health infrastructure in these countries, so they can manage large-scale medical operations. They need hospitals and health centers equipped with the staff, storage and supplies to distribute vaccines and other life-saving treatments to the most remote areas, and they require the resources for community outreach to raise awareness and help people understand the benefits of these treatments, so vaccine and other drug uptake improves.

A failure to vaccinate globally puts us all at risk, not only for a new variant but a future pandemic.

Protect the planet

Climate change alters how humans relate to other species, and that matters to our health and risk for infection. Many of the root causes of climate change are the same for pandemics—deforestation, a loss of habitat, which forces wild animals to migrate and come into contact with humans and domesticated animals. If we continue to disturb Earth's natural ecology, we will increase the risk of spread of disease and future threats far worse than COVID-19.

Supporting Indigenous communities is key to protecting the planet. They can significantly reduce deforestation and prevent roughly 300 billion metric tons of carbon from escaping into



► The **Global Alliance of Territorial Communities** is a coalition of Indigenous and local communities of the Amazon Basin, Brazil, Indonesia and Mesoamerica that represents peoples in 18 countries and protects more than 840 million hectares of tropical forests. The alliance's sustained advocacy at the local, regional and global level was instrumental in securing unprecedented commitments at the 2021 United Nations climate summit. Leaders from more than 100 countries pledged \$19.2 billion to end deforestation by 2030, citing the key role of Indigenous and local communities in forest stewardship.

the atmosphere every year. While these communities claim customary rights over at least half the world's lands and forests, they have secured legal rights to only 18%, leaving the land open for commercial development and the extraction of natural resources. Extraction exacerbates inequalities and drives climate change.

With countries emerging from COVID and governments across the Global South under pressure to jumpstart their economies—likely at the cost of exploited natural resources—time is of the essence. Governments and the energy sector need to take steps toward a low-carbon, sustainable energy transition and equitable governance. We also need to commit more resources to Indigenous peoples to scale their efforts. (Right now, less than 1% of climate finance supports Indigenous communities.) With the impacts of climate change intensifying, we must protect the planet and put a stop to future pandemics to ensure a safe future for each and every one of us.

Advance racial, gender, & disability inclusion

While COVID has impacted everyone, certain communities have been hit disproportionately hard, forcing us to reckon with a long history of injustice.

Black Americans have accounted for the largest share of hospitalizations and deaths, magnifying racial health disparities that have gone unaddressed. People with disabilities, who regularly confront bias in medical care, have struggled to access critical support through the pandemic. Faced with joblessness and a lack of savings, people of color saw the worst of the financial shocks, widening an already massive gap in economic inequality. Women experienced a historic departure from the global workforce, with 2.2 million out in the U.S. alone by 2021. Gender-based violence, which was already on the rise globally, thrives on other crises and saw a significant uptick as



► The Ford Foundation has committed \$420 million over five years to tackle gender inequality, which has been further exacerbated by COVID-19. This pledge focuses on addressing the growing epidemic of gender-based violence, reinforcing the need for a care-based economy, increasing workplace equality, and bringing critical resources to feminist movements. As part of this commitment, we're supporting the **Equality Fund**, the largest self-sustaining fund for gender equality in the world, bringing together 90 global partners. From supporting COVID response efforts to providing resources for women's rights and LGBTQ+ organizations, the Equality Fund aims to double investment into women's organizations and feminist movements.

countries went under lockdown. Women of color, immigrant and disabled women, and transgender and non-binary people are disproportionately impacted by this type of violence.

While these communities have shouldered the burden of the pandemic, they have also been at the forefront of the fight for justice. We need to support those most affected by oppression by shifting harmful narratives and repressive power dynamics, uprooting the systems that perpetuate inequality, and strengthening the laws and policies to protect their rights, so they can live healthy, fulfilling lives free of fear. When given the power and support to lead, these diverse, multifaceted communities are driving progressive solutions to rebuild our world to work for everyone.

Make technology accessible & equitable

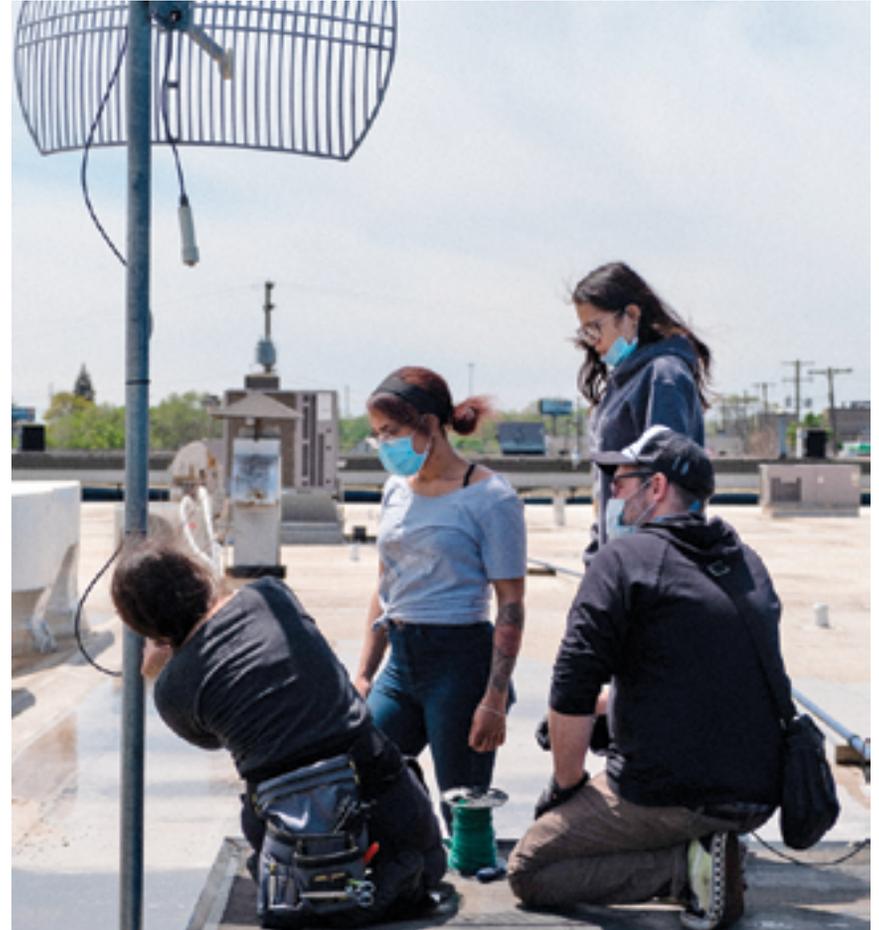
From working remotely to connecting with loved ones, our reliance on technology became evident in the pandemic. As much as technology has become an intrinsic part of our lives, the rapid development of new technologies has outpaced regulation and public understanding, leaving us all exposed to unchecked harms.

Innovation without clearly defined set of laws and standards can lead to adverse consequences, such as software that allows businesses to surveil remote workers, facial recognition systems that fuel racial profiling, and algorithms that unjustly calculate the recidivism risk of criminal defendants.

To defend and protect individuals' interests, we must support the growing field of public interest technology, which works across academia, civil society, and the public and private sectors to ensure innovations are created, governed, and regulated responsibly.

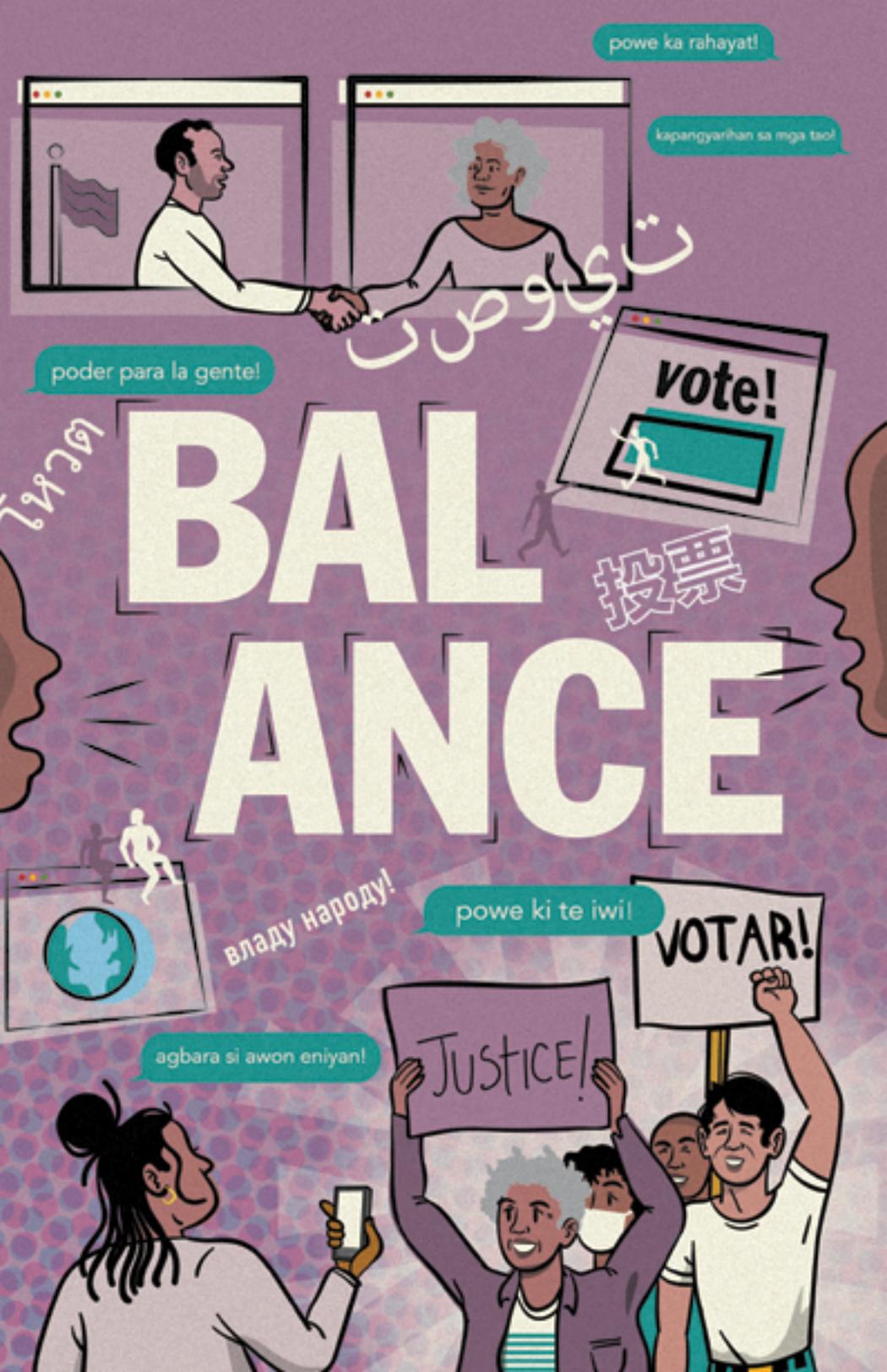
Technology has the potential to be a great equalizer, but we need to make sure it is seen and governed as a public good and made accessible to all. Almost half the world's population lacks access to the internet. A recent study revealed that a lack of internet access had a direct correlation to COVID-19 deaths, making the case for access a health necessity. Access to high-speed, reliable internet opens up opportunities in

education, employment, banking, health care and other important components of connection and social mobility. But those opportunities are only possible when technology is seen as a necessity for full democratic, economic and cultural participation and protected to serve the needs of all people.



► The **Detroit Community Technology Project** provides low-cost, high-speed internet for Detroit's underserved communities to increase digital literacy and empower residents to become digital stewards. Detroit remains one of the most disconnected cities in the U.S.—38% of homes have no internet connection and 70% of school-age children have no Internet access at home. The project has trained community members to install wireless access points, fiber hookups and hotspots, averaging nearly 2,500 new users per month in the first year of the pandemic, and educated residents on how to safely and effectively use the web to build an impressive internet network across Detroit.





REIMAGINE BALANCE

COVID-19, in many ways, marks the first global health emergency, moving faster and farther to touch every corner of the world than any pandemic of the past. As we faced this universal threat, it showed us how interconnected the world is and opened up an opportunity for international cooperation and solidarity.

However, we saw nations turn inward to protect their own citizens and economies while xenophobia, anti-semitism and various forms of racism proliferated, geopolitical rivalries deepened, and multilateral cooperation and institutions suffered from the pervasive spread of a nation-first mindset. Within countries, we also saw divides widen as they each grappled with their own issues of equality and injustice.

As the world opens back up, we have an opportunity to reflect on how our social, economic, political and governance systems operate on a national and global level—and how they need to change. The challenges we face require new systems of cooperation that foster a balance of power and resources, so we can imagine a truly equitable future that enables all countries and populations to prosper.

Protect & promote civic space and engagement

Around the world, billions of people are excluded from full participation in the political, economic, and cultural systems that shape their lives. Without the space to organize or the opportunity to speak out, laws and policies fail to address their needs, enabling the powerful to acquire more power and deepening inequality.

During the pandemic, civil society has been instrumental in providing vital support to the most vulnerable. However, civic space—be it physical or digital—is rapidly shrinking due to governments abusing their power, increasing surveillance, rising criminalization of activists and journalists, and restrictions on civil society’s ability to register, operate and receive funding. Since March 2020, 155 countries have placed new restrictions on public assemblies. In the U.S, voter suppression, gerrymandering, attacks on the media, and efforts to roll back protections like the Voting Rights Act are eroding trust in the government and creating hurdles for civic engagement.

Thriving civic spaces and meaningful civic engagements are required for people to raise their voices, influence decisions, and hold governments to account. We are witnessing a political awakening fueled by movements of historically excluded groups who refuse to be silenced. We must increase opportunities for diverse communities to fully participate in civic life and support the multi-issue, multicultural organizations at the heart of these movements.

We must protect journalists and social leaders calling out injustices and abuses of power, and cultivate a free press that’s fully representative of the world we live in. And we must urge governments and multilateral organizations to commit to safeguarding and expanding civic spaces to preserve the freedom of assembly, association and expression for everyone.

Bolster international cooperation

As a world, we are focused on achieving the same shared goals—from ending COVID-19 to mitigating climate change—but turning those goals into real, concrete action has been a challenge. As a result, low- to middle-income countries,



► The power of civil society to provide critical resources to those in need has been demonstrated in all corners of the world. In Tunisia, 100,000 people leveraged social media to pool resources to fight the virus and worked with regional authorities to identify families with urgent financial needs. In Brazil, organizations like **Redes da Mare** supported efforts to distribute food, masks, medical aid assistance, and access to reliable information about the pandemic to 54,000 people across 16 favelas.

particularly in the Global South, bear the brunt of these crises, exacerbating inequality on an international scale. The pandemic has exposed and accelerated a shift in the global order, a shift that was necessary well before the virus’s arrival.

Progress is only possible when all countries can prosper. As we see how interconnected and interdependent we are, we have an incredible opportunity to redefine how we operate as a global society. Collective action and cooperation are essential to address our shared challenges and advance justice. Already, we are seeing what’s possible as governments, corporations, organizations and citizens far and wide come together to support Ukraine, despite Russia’s relentless attempts to pressure democracies into failure, challenge international alliances, and erode unity.

To protect that web of mutuality and reimagine our global systems with equity at their core, we need more voices at the table—especially the Global South and historically excluded communities—to design solutions and foster strategic alliances among organizations and governments at every level. We need to effectively utilize and modernize multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization, so we can bridge divides between nations, break down barriers to development, and meet the challenges facing us today—and tomorrow. And we need to bring together diverse ideas, individuals and institutions to create a shared vision for the world that will lead to an inclusive global order.



► The **Global Initiative on Polarization**, spearheaded by the **Institute for Integrated Transitions** and the Ford Foundation, is a multi-year effort fostering a deeper global understanding of the diverse causes and consequences of severe polarization. Through research, global convenings, and work in select countries, the initiative examines challenges and solutions at the nexus of polarization, conflict and social justice.

Stem the rise of polarization

From India to the United States, polarization has been tearing at the seams of democracies long before COVID-19 swept the globe. If it continues to spread, it can undermine and severely damage the institutions essential to democracy, erode public trust, and exacerbate intolerance, discrimination and violence.

From deeply rooted divisions to divisive leaders who stoke tensions to the rise of misinformation, the drivers and patterns of polarization transcend borders. Polarization can then entrench itself in society, enabling factious actions and reactions to feed off each other, ultimately dragging countries into a downward spiral of anger and division.

Uniting a deeply divided country is difficult and complex, but it's not impossible if we're willing to confront the root causes of injustice that fuel polarization. We must create opportunities to give rise to a diverse range of voices and support the civil society groups that advocate for underrepresented perspectives. We need governments and funders to provide those organizations with the resources they need to operate, especially in hostile environments, and enlist their help to protect the activists and journalists at the center of the fight for justice. We have to find bigger, bolder ways to collaborate across borders because polarization is infectious, and no single organization or government can tackle it alone.

And perhaps, most importantly, governments and leaders must embrace the criticism and be open to change, so we can figure out how to forge ahead united and build a just future together.



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Cover and chapter illustrations by Justine Alletette Ross, a Detroit-based artist who aims to cultivate a visual language that can be understood by everyone through design.

The Ford Foundation is an independent organization working to address inequality and build a future grounded in justice. For more than 85 years, it has supported visionaries on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. Today, with an endowment of \$16 billion, the foundation has headquarters in New York and 10 regional offices across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

Learn more at fordfoundation.org.





Learn more at
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