



Building Forward Better:

A Clean and Just Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic

A White paper from the Office of Senator Rosa Galvez

Executive Summary

A crisis is sweeping the globe and unless we heed the advice of scientists and take action, millions of people will die and billions more are at risk. Sound familiar? COVID-19, like climate change, threatens our economic, social, and physical well-being. The advent of this deadly virus, however, should be understood as a symptom or co-hazard of environmental degradation and climate change rather than an extraneous event. Human-caused environmental degradation is increasing the likelihood and severity of pandemics.

Along with the tragic impact the pandemic has had on our health, it has exposed the vulnerabilities of a broken system. The lockdown conditions have taken a disproportionate toll on lower income individuals, the elderly, and groups who already bear a degree of structural oppression: women, Indigenous Peoples, and racialized individuals. Further, the pandemic has revealed a system wherein we exploit the finite natural resources of our planet with the illogical expectation of infinite growth and governments subsidize environmentally destructive behaviour through support to polluting industries and corporation. Unbridled economic growth is the root cause of ecological destabilization and flatlining living standards for many.

As stimulus begins to flow, we must reflect on the ultimate goal and the most efficient way to achieve it. A clean and just recovery is one that puts people before profit and focuses on furthering and eventually achieving human and ecosystem wellbeing. Such a goal implies the development of principles and tools that will not only ensure that the costs and benefits of the recovery will be distributed equitably, but also help shift our concept of growth to be centered around sustainable prosperity – after all, the economy must serve society, not the other way around.

The purpose of this white paper is to document the government's emergency response to the pandemic to date and the work of experts advocating for a holistic approach to rebuilding Canadian society to achieve greater overall collective well-being. The paper describes how we got to this point of multiple crises and why a clean and just recovery will be critical in addressing them synergistically. It draws inspiration from other groups advocating for similar policies to explore how much should be invested, where and how the funds can be recouped, and finally a set of core policy recommendations that integrate the principles and implementation tools for such a recovery.

Traditional stimulus measures have a poor governance and transparency track record. Looking forward, we must worry about reinforcing a *status quo* of over investment into soon-to-be stranded assets, unnecessary exposure to financial risk, and increasing inequality. Meanwhile, a mix of policies that prioritize human and ecosystem wellbeing in an attempt to build *forward* better does exactly the opposite through the synergistic production of co-benefits. All policies must be scrutinized through gender, social justice, and climate lenses which must be rapidly developed and implemented as well as carry strict measures for accountability, transparency, and conditionality.

Canadians have demonstrated, with the wave of environmental protests of the last few years through the country culminating in September 2019, that they want the transition to a low-carbon economy to accelerate and be completed. In fact, due to inaction, which has hampered this transition for the past three decades, we now need a rapid and far-reaching *transformation*. Recent polls show most Canadians view the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to address more than one crisis with the same recovery. There is strong support for taxing extreme wealth, investment in sustainable industries, and reinforcing our commitment to fight climate change through both mitigation and adaptation.

The clean and just recovery that Canadians are demanding should be seen as an investment, with a high potential for returns, in our collective future well-being rather than simply an outflow of public funds.

“This crisis, its impact, and the government response is an historical moment. We parliamentarians have an important duty to fulfil. We are accountable for the success or failure of the response and must use every opportunity to build a more resilient society. Through this report, we hope to invite a constructive and inclusive conversation on possible ways to move forward together.”

- The Honourable Rosa Galvez

“Its not a question of having the economy here and the environment there and worrying about trade-offs, the economy is a subsystem of the biosphere. It lives within it. Everything we do in the economy – everything we produce and everything we consume comes from nature.”

– Dr. Peter Victor

“The climate emergency is like the COVID-19 emergency, just in slow motion and much graver. Both involve market failures, externalities, international cooperation, complex science, questions of system resilience, political leadership, and action that hinges on public support.”

– Dr. Cameron Hepburn

“Now that government spending is being unleashed on a massive scale, the public has a right to demand that companies receiving help contribute to social and racial justice, improved health and the shift to a greener, more knowledge-based economy.”

– Dr. Joseph Stiglitz

Key Recommendations

- 1** In addition to the **Gender-based Analysis Plus gender lens**, all policies must be viewed through a **climate lens that will consider impacts to future generations and a social justice lens which ensures benefits and costs of the recovery are distributed equitably**, including to structurally oppressed groups such as Indigenous Peoples and those who experience intersections of discrimination.


- 2** **The recovery must focus on helping people rather than corporations.** This includes establishing a *guaranteed livable income* (GLI), ensuring all Canadians have reliable access to basic services, and investing in younger generations by providing opportunities for education and training in the clean industries of the future.


- 3** **In the case that financial assistance is provided to large corporations, it should be done with accountability measures and enforceable, verifiable commitments to contribute to human and ecosystem wellbeing.** The Crown corporations and decision-makers who bear the responsibility of allocating resources must therefore also be held to greater standards of transparency and disclosure as well as strict adherence to conditionality.


- 4** **The recovery must harness the potential of our natural ecosystems** by supporting indigenous guardians of traditional indigenous lands, incentivizing climate-smart agriculture, reimbursing farmers for the ecosystem services they provide, and funding restoration and conservation practices.


- 5** **This investment in building forward better should coincide with practicable methods of recouping its cost** that also combat rising inequality such as a tax on the wealthiest Canadians, ensuring corporations are paying their fair share of taxes and not unduly profiting from these crises, as well as ending support to the fossil fuel industry.


- 6** **Improve the built environment** by providing incentives for energy audits and energy efficient retrofits - these should be supported by stringent and well-enforced building codes. Governments must lead by example with a focus on procurement rules that rigorously apply all best practices for efficiency and climate change mitigation and adaptation.


- 7** **The ways we produce, transport, and use energy need to be modernized** by using renewable sources of electricity, smart grids and improved connectivity, and doing less with more by improving the efficiency of end usages.



- 8 **Industry must be transformed** with a focus on giving opportunity to innovative sectors and promoting principles of circularity such as digitalization, the right to repair, and legislations against planned obsolescence and wasteful packaging. 
- 9 **Upgrade the way we move** with transportation sector policies that focus on the provision of public transportation, promoting active transit, and zero-emission vehicle uptake and charging infrastructure. 
- 10 **Promote and support R&D for sectors at the intersection between social sciences, technology and engineering** in emerging areas including public health and pandemics; efficient and integrated use of construction materials; electricity production, storage and transmission; and communication and multimedia. 
- 11 **Data collection must be active, intense, timely and rigorous** with particular attention to race and gender-based disaggregated data gathering and monitoring how clean and just recovery efforts are performing among different groups. This will require collaboration between a variety of departments and organizations including Health Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Statistics Canada, and other levels of government. 

