Introduction

We live in difficult times. At the time of writing (early October 2021), Covid-19 has infected well over 237 million people worldwide and caused more than 4.8 million deaths ([World Health Organization](#)).[1] As well as a health crisis of tragic proportions, it is a socioeconomic crisis. The shockwaves of death and illness, as well as lockdown measures intended to stop its spread, have reached far into communities – affecting the most economically and socially vulnerable the worst.

Local communities and their networks on the frontline are self-organising to combat the spread of the virus and support the most vulnerable. Such spontaneous, self-organising community resilience is proving to be a crucial element in navigating this exceptional disruption.

In mid-2020, the [International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD)](#)[2] and the [Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN)](#)[3] joined together to gather and publish stories from their networks of community-based organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America, to tell how people at community level are coping with Covid-19: the 'Voices from the Frontline' series. ICCCAD and CDKN, as their names suggest, are organisations that are principally concerned with climate change and how to create greater resilience and adaptive capacity to deal with its impacts. So, why create this series on Covid-19?

The reality is that Covid-19 has compounded the challenges that countless local communities are already facing at the intersection of climate vulnerability, economic poverty, lack of development services and political marginalisation. Yet, these communities have already devised and, over time, have strengthened their coping strategies for dealing with multiple hazards and risks. They have found that their diverse ways of being resilient – involving everything from women's networks to savings and loans associations to community radio outlets – have proven indispensable in responding to Covid-19. They have drawn on, built upon and extended these forms of community organisation and leadership to respond to the new and evolving crisis. They have a

lot to tell the rest of the world about what resilience looks like and how people in partnership, led by community priorities, can re-establish progress on the [United Nations' 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.](#)[4]

The intention of the Voices from the Frontline series is to provide testimonies of communities' resilience and leadership during these unprecedented times – to act as chroniclers of an age. A further aim of the series is to identify specifically what communities say they need, in terms of support from external actors. The Voices from the Frontline initiative comprises part of a larger initiative of the [Global Resilience Partnership](#)[5] on 'Learning from Covid-19 to create a new normal for the resilience of the most vulnerable'.

The history of development policies within countries and international development efforts between countries is littered with well-intentioned initiatives that backfire, because their design fails to incorporate the priorities and capacities of the people they are meant to serve. The Voices from the Frontline stories, by contrast, are rich with statements of *what communities have done for themselves and what they want.*

The following report presents a synthesis of key learning from community initiatives in addressing the Covid-19 crisis in combination with multiple other hazards and risks, including weather and climate risks. It is not intended to be a systematic or representative survey of local communities. Rather, the editors intentionally reached out to grassroots groups and their federations, especially women- and youth-led groups in marginalised communities. These range from informal settlements with few or no government services, to remote rural communities. The aim of the series has been to give a space to the voices that are not normally heard on international platforms.

Each Voices from the Frontline story can be read individually and in its entirety on the [ICCCAD](#)[6] or [CDKN](#)[7] websites. Each story has essentially two parts: first, it describes the actions and opinions of community activists and entrepreneurs in their own words. Second, each story has been documented by an interviewer from a local civil society organisation, NGO or university, whose biographical profile and

organisation is also detailed, with their analytical perspective on their community's challenges and achievements.

Although the stories published under the Voices from the Frontline initiative describe difficult times, the stories' ultimate message is of hope and inspiration. They turn a lens on the extraordinary ingenuity and determination of people to help each other and create lasting community development solutions out of short-term humanitarian crises.

The following chapters synthesise these many stories from around the world and look at them through the prism of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and what communities have done to retain hard-won development in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis and other multiple shocks.

Each chapter provides insights into specific challenges posed to the advancement of key SDGs at community level: SDG1 (end poverty), SDG2 (end hunger), SDG3 (healthy lives), SDG5 (empowerment of women and girls), SDG6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG13 (climate action) and SDG17 (partnerships). The chapters describe, through anecdotes, how local people's ingenuity and coping actions are delivering on these goals in the short-term, and what external support is needed for longer-term solutions. A cross-cutting chapter at the end considers the roles of appropriate finance, innovation and political empowerment to achieve development progress. A final chapter provides conclusions and recommendations for the global community, particularly in light of COP26 and the UNFCCC process, the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction and the UNDRR process.

Young people created a new Ghanaian agribusiness during the pandemic, which aims to be climate-smart, too. © Sedem.