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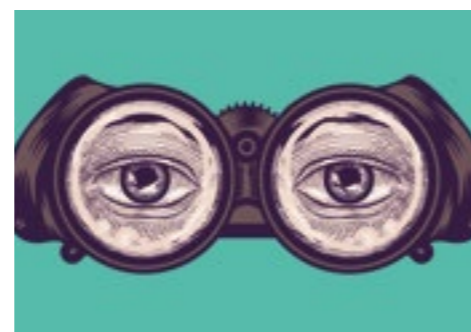
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Ann Kiernan

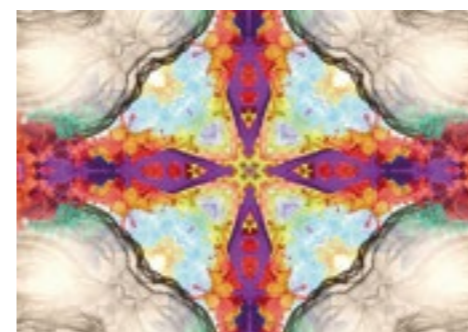
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Lovelyn Medina | 123rf

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Maxim Usik | Ikon Images

Cover story: A year of cascading, complex crises
Cover image: Miles Cole

comment

This edition's front cover depicts some of the events that have occurred in 2020, which has most certainly been one of the most challenging and tumultuous years any of us will have experienced. We may be overworking the Pandora's box (or jar) analogy, but these last 12 months truly exemplify the myth of 'great and unexpected troubles'. Of course, many of these had been foreseen, or were heralded by clear precursors and signs.



But unheeded warnings notwithstanding, these events have certainly combined to strain individual, professional, community, business, national and international resilience as never before.

Twelve months ago, CRJ's front cover warned leaders that: "All eyes are on you." In today's landscape of repeated shockwaves, cascading crises and, "instant systemic contamination that piles up challenges on multiple fronts," leadership across all disciplines – political, business, governance and institutional – is being scrutinised as never before. Sadly, reactions and responses to the pandemic have been, to put it politely, erratic in many areas.

Worryingly, we know that more shocks are on the way – wishful thinking will not magically sweep away the harsh onslaught of climate-related events. The "toxic polarisation, anti-scientific mindsets and retreats into alternative realities" mentioned on p14 are symptoms, not the cause of today's lack of coherence and solidarity in the face of global threats.

Yet, as with Pandora's box, there are glimmers of hope. Human innovation, creativity, business and science have combined to develop vaccines and deliver other life-saving products and services in record time. Stories of self-sacrifice, dedication and love abound. People are still caring for others.

All of us in society, but particularly our leaders and those responsible for the safety and security of communities, must not let the next wave of crises come to pass in a wilful paroxysm of inattentive blindness.

And here's hoping that 'deceptive expectation', which is the alternative interpretation of 'hope' in the Pandora myth, does not hold true.

How Covid-19 unveils the systemic nature of risks

As the global pandemic continues to wreak havoc around the world, it has become clear that societies and governments have under invested in disaster risk reduction strategies, particularly when it comes to climate change threats. However, **Rosalind Cook** and **Sebastien Penzini** say that there are early lessons that can be learned to assist a green and sustainable recovery

Covid-19 has been a global shock. The coronavirus has wreaked havoc and all countries are simultaneously managing the worst disaster this generation has experienced. Even before the virus has been brought under control, it is clear the Covid-19 disaster is a watershed moment that has changed how we need to manage disaster risks. Like other major disasters in human history, this crisis will influence and shape future risk reduction and resilience policies worldwide.

As we learn the painful lessons from this pandemic, we need to build transformational approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR), which addresses the systemic nature of risks, tackles the impact of cascading effects and definitively breaks this cycle of disaster, response and recovery. This is of ever greater importance with the increasing intensity of climate change effects.

The Covid-19 crisis is far from over, but early lessons can be drawn. The crisis has exposed how all societies have systematically under invested in DRR, especially in regard to biological hazards and pandemic risks. As we come out of this crisis, we must build back better, with the overarching objective to make it a green, resilient recovery that prevents new risks.

Cascading and compounding risks

A first early lesson from the Covid-19 pandemic is that we need to improve our understanding of how risk cascades and compounds across systems and sectors. The crises we face – from climate, inequality, health and security, to migration, food security or cybersecurity – are only solvable if we treat them as a whole system to tackle. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the urgency of building coherence and integrating agendas.

As we cannot go back to business as usual, the need is now to understand better how societies, economies and risks are interconnected and interdependent. Structural vulnerabilities, human actions and climate change induce cascading crises that undermine socioeconomic and sustainable development more than any other factors, including conflicts. As the *UNDRR 2019 Global Assessment Report* headlined: Disasters are producing further disasters, which are more complex, deadly and costly.

A second early lesson is on good governance. The Covid-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on the quality and effectiveness of national disaster risk governance. In different countries, national strategies for DRR have a key role for better prevention and preparedness. However, developing a national DRR strategy is not enough; each strategic plan requires implementation and to be operationalised. To support this in Europe, the UNDRR Regional Office for Europe has developed a Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy Assessment Process, based on Sendai Framework core requirements, which can assist governments to assess their strategies with a higher level of granularity and objectivity.

A third lesson is that few countries have made adequate inclusion of biological risks, including pandemic risk management, in their national and local strategies for DRR. Preparing for pandemic risk and engaging a whole-of-government approach are critical. We need to learn from each other on Covid-19 to increase synergies for preparedness and resilience. UNDRR has been supporting knowledge exchanges in collaboration with the World Health Organisation, in May and September of this year. These exchanges included dialogues with European and Central Asian member states on experiences and challenges for Covid-19 response.

While learning from the Covid-19 pandemic, we must prepare and enhance resilience in the face of the next crisis, especially the climate emergency. During the pandemic, disasters caused by natural hazards have not paused, and global climate temperatures have not stopped rising. During the pandemic there have been deadly earthquakes in Croatia, Turkey and Greece; wildfires in many

countries; and deadly flooding in Italy and France. Mainstreaming DRR and climate change adaptation into planning processes and financing mechanisms will help governments better prepare for and manage risks and their potential for cascading effects across systems.

There is clear evidence that in 2019, with global average temperatures 1.1°C above the preindustrial period, the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events – including heatwaves, droughts, flooding, winter storms, hurricanes and wildfire – are having severe effects. To mark the annual International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction on October 13, UNDRR released a new report on the *Human Costs of Disasters*, which shared the latest data to demonstrate this.

Between 2000 and 2019, there were 510,837 deaths and 3.9 billion people affected by 6,681

climate-related disasters. This compares with 3,656 climate-related events, which accounted for 995,330 deaths (47 per cent from drought or famine) and 3.2 billion people affected in the period from 1980 to 1999.

The increasingly systemic nature of disaster risk, with the overlapping of events and the interplay between risk drivers such as poverty, climate change, air pollution, population growth in hazard-exposed areas, uncontrolled urbanisation and the loss of biodiversity, requires better knowledge of evolving hazards and interconnected risks related to climate change.

Resilient infrastructure is an important element, as climate change further exacerbates disaster risks, placing an additional burden on assets. The *Sendai Framework Monitor* reported that in 2018 alone, 1,889 infrastructure assets in 20 countries in Europe and Central Asia were damaged or destroyed as a result of disasters (many of which were climate related), amounting to direct economic losses of over three billion dollars. The energy, transportation and water sectors in Europe are particularly at risk. Recent UNDRR analysis indicates that the cost of the recovery of infrastructure from climate change-induced hazards could jump tenfold under a business as usual scenario. It is essential, therefore, to learn from the Covid-19 pandemic, invest in DRR and strengthen governance to prepare for the growing climate impacts.

Looking ahead, 2021 will be a crucial year for transforming our approach to managing disaster risk. As we hope that the Covid-19 pandemic will be brought under control, the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction will bring together 55 member states, stakeholders and partners, hosted by Portugal in November 2021. The conference will focus on how to think and act differently about disasters and special attention will be paid to how risk cascades, building back better and agreeing a transformational approach to DRR. This also comes at a moment where the Europe region implements a green and resilient recovery.

Moreover, at the local level, UNDRR has just launched the 2030 Making Cities Resilient Campaign (MCR2030), gathering a global partnership of actors with expertise in urban resilience, DRR, climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals. The aim is to provide a suite of tools and knowledge guidance, from an existing pool of partners that cities can use to reduce risks and build resilience.

There is an opportunity, from the painful lessons of the Covid-19 crisis, to build back better and ensure a resilient, green recovery.

With the momentum underway, there is much to inspire, and a major chance to achieve genuinely risk-informed approaches, to protect lives and livelihoods and secure our progress towards the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

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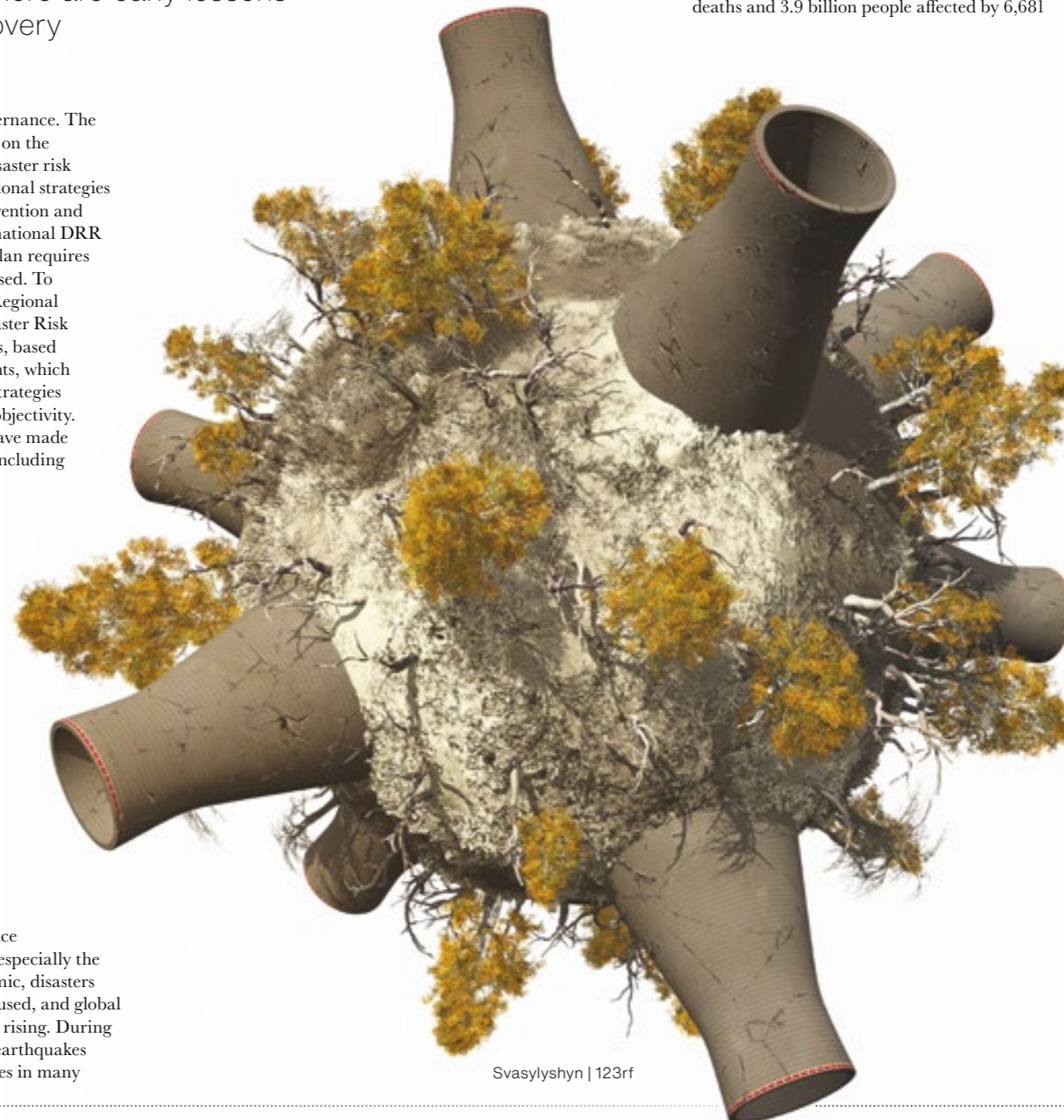
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