

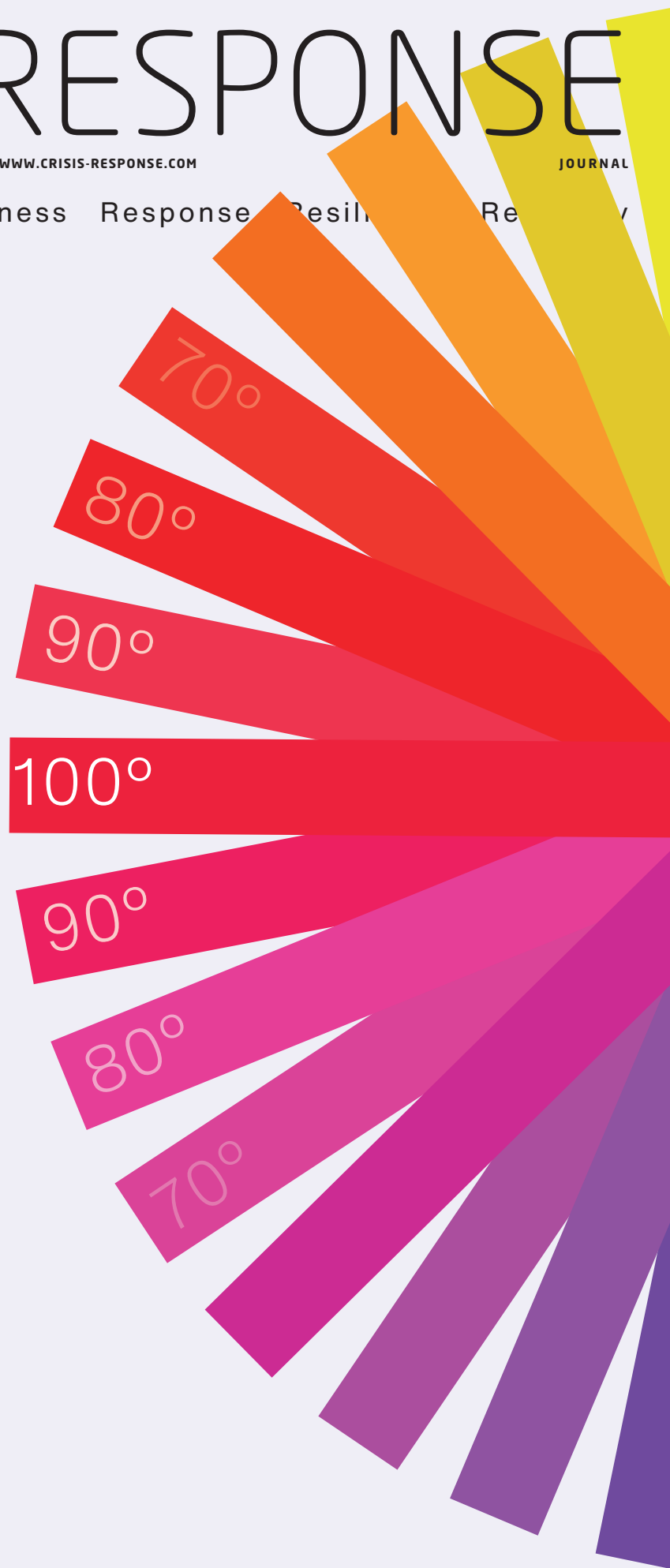
# CRISIS ▶ RESPONSE

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JOURNAL

Protection Prevention Preparedness Response Resilience Recovery



## FLASHPOINTS

Volatility in Trust, Climate, Society

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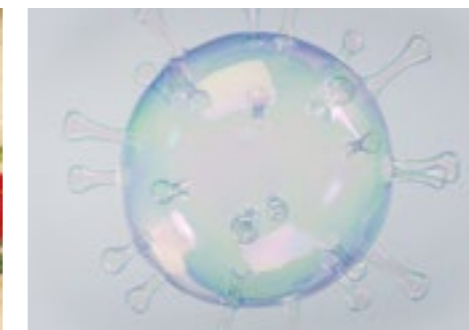
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Cover story: Rising temperatures  
Cover image: Gracie Broom

comment

**T**his edition's cover is a representation of the increasing volatility and temperature of opinions, discourse and beliefs.



An 'addiction to outrage' is heating up (p76) and red hot rhetoric is dwarfing calmer, pragmatic and measured reasoning, like a rampant infection burning through communities and the world. Our feature on society and polarisation unpicks this phenomenon, because to treat the symptoms, we must first understand the causes, recognising how a complex online ecosystem inflames predispositions to the point where they boil over into real world consequences.

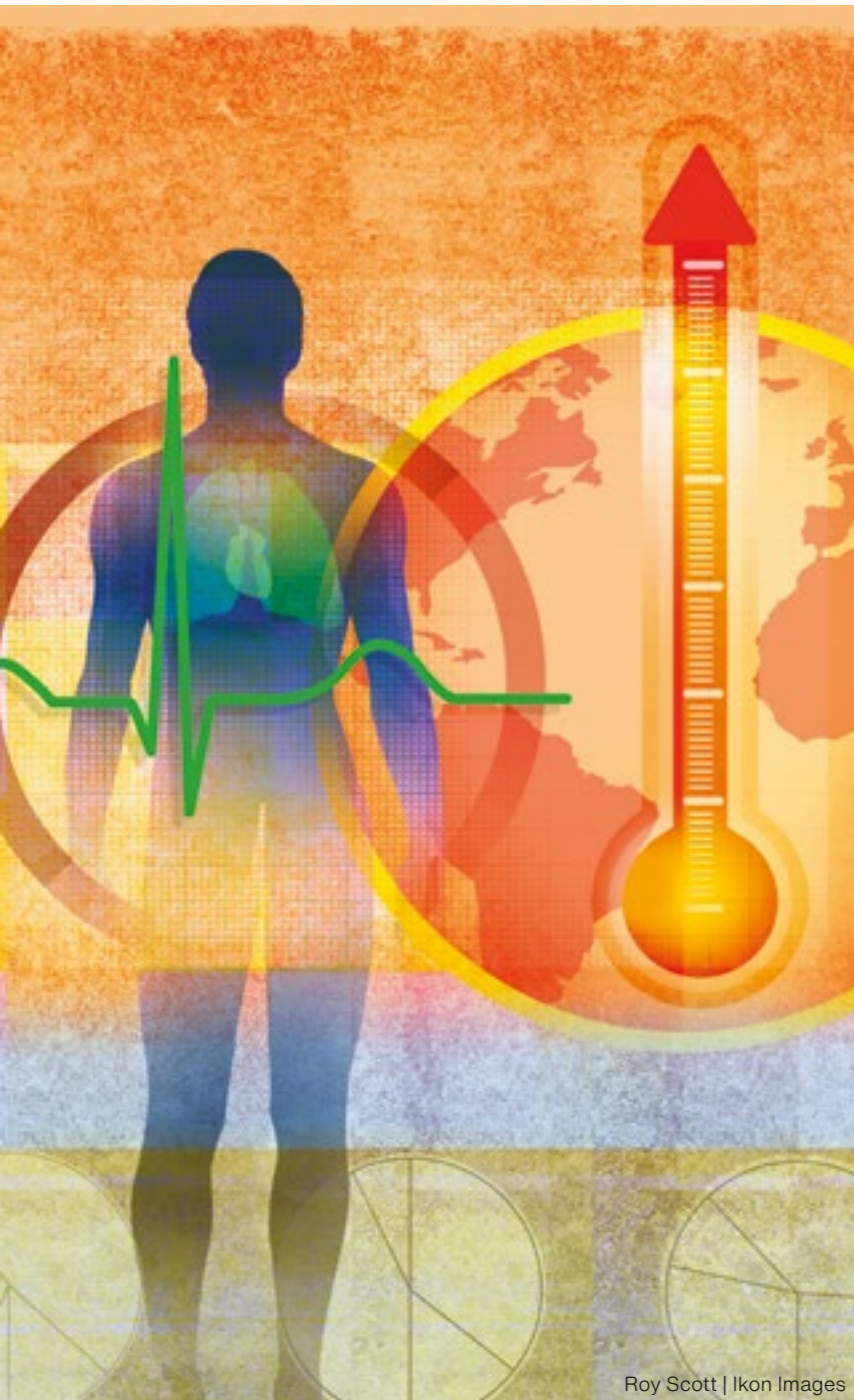
But the cover is also a more literal depiction of climbing temperatures and a far less stable world environment. CRJ has covered climate issues for many years, homing in on how they affect frontline responders, societies and individuals. More than climate and rising temperatures – the tipping points to calamity are manifold and include biodiversity and ecosystems. Humanity's complex interaction with nature means we treat the world's resources as if they are an infinite commodity, squandering and polluting without considering the repercussions (p54 and p58).

The Covid-19 pandemic is far from over, but the small glimmers of hope have become more concrete. As Mami Mizutori of the UNDRR says on p50, we must seize the opportunity of crisis and: "Use it to understand better what is going on around us. We mustn't see a disaster or crisis purely as a threat... If we prevent better, the recovery process can be a wonderful opportunity, or it can be a catastrophe." Governments, the public, private and third sectors can apply valuable lessons and build back better. Part of this lies in succession planning, diversity, proactive leadership resilience and continuous improvement, as covered by our feature (from p14 onwards).

Because as we keep our feet firmly planted in the present, while remembering and drawing upon what has been learnt from the past, we have to keep both eyes firmly fixed on the horizon to anticipate the future, and make sure that in solving current problems, we do not unintentionally create new risks, or exacerbate latent threats.

# Why international co-operation and risk governance matter

**Mami Mizutori** says that lessons from past emergencies can be applied to avoid future catastrophes, but this requires countries to collaborate



Roy Scott | Ikon Images

Last year saw the collision of two major planetary emergencies: climate change and a global pandemic. Now more than ever, it is vital that there is no more backsliding when it comes to implementing global agreements that safeguard the future of our planet and humanity.

It is a major boost to the cause of global governance and co-operation that the US has rejoined the *Paris Agreement* and will remain in the WHO at a time when multilateralism is in crisis.

Let us hope that 2021 will be the: “Year to change gear and put the world on track,” as the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, has exhorted. It needs to be. We cannot afford to be caught with our heads wilfully stuck in the sand again.

The *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* called for international co-operation on reducing the risks from biological hazards when it was adopted six years ago. This was at the insistence of UN member states that had experience of outbreaks of SARS, Ebola, H1N1 and MERS.

## Interconnected hazards

Memories of the Ebola crisis in west Africa from 2014 to 2016, which were so influential in shaping the *Sendai Framework*, have been revived by the recent recurrence of the disease in Guinea, a country at the origin of the earlier epidemic that spread quickly to neighbouring Sierra Leone and Liberia, with a cost of 11,300 lives.

When that epidemic was finally brought under control in 2016, UNDRR organised an international conference with the WHO and the Government of Thailand to agree on the *Bangkok Principles*.

These include seven recommendations to help countries prevent and respond to emerging biological hazards, which had been predicted to become part of the so-called new normal.

The *Bangkok Principles* emphasise that to reduce risk from biological hazards, it is vital to adopt a multisectoral approach to strengthening co-ordination and interoperability between disaster and health risk management authorities at the national level (see p50).

The *Principles* underline the need for shared risk assessment, surveillance and early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, and co-ordinated incident management. This strengthened co-ordination is much needed as the interconnected and transboundary nature of biological hazards increases; 75 per cent of new and

emerging human infectious diseases are zoonotic.

The *Bangkok Principles* need to be integrated into national strategies for DRR as part of prevention and preparedness for future epidemics and pandemics. There were 101 such national strategies in place at the end of last year in response to *Sendai Framework* Target (e): “Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local DRR strategies by 2020.”

It is expected that more will follow this year as UN member states prepare to participate in a series of regional platforms on DRR. These will take stock of progress on implementing the *Sendai Framework* six years after its adoption, and the efforts that have been made to strengthen disaster risk governance in particular.

It is UNDRR’s intention that these regional platforms boost the international effort led by the WHO to improve co-operation and co-ordination on biological hazards and encourage the provision of healthcare system support in countries struggling to contain the pandemic and other disease threats.

They will also be sounding boards for representatives of low and middle income countries to voice their concerns about the failure in global risk governance and international co-operation that has left 130 countries – a combined population of 2.5 billion people – without a single dose of a vaccine at the time of writing. Most of these are low and middle income countries whose health systems are under-resourced at the best of times.

It is important that health workers and older people in these countries are fast-tracked to be vaccinated, given the danger that the longer it takes to suppress the virus worldwide, the more likely it is that new strains and variants will emerge.

The world must commit to a well co-ordinated multilateral response, which includes more wealthy countries joining the COVAX initiative and supporting the ACT-Accelerator to advance multilateral efforts for Covid-19 vaccine distribution, equitable access, and research and development. We must remember that nobody is safe until we are all safe.

The other great challenge testing global governance and international co-operation is the climate emergency. This sits at the apex of a pyramid of human-induced problems, including unbridled and irresponsible consumption of the Earth’s limited resources, destruction of protective ecosystems, the extinction of species and great loss of biodiversity.

We have declared war on nature, laying the foundations for our own demise as a species. The Earth is on a fast track to becoming a toxic petri dish where extreme weather events flourish and biological hazards can thrive.

Efforts to secure increased levels of ambition for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions were thrown off course in 2020 when COP26 was postponed to November this year. The urgency of seeing increased ambition in Nationally Determined Contributions is obvious to all. We have seen that extreme weather events have almost doubled over the last 20 years and existing low levels of ambition on greenhouse gas reductions have set the world on course for a catastrophic 3°C temperature rise.

The ball on reducing the risk of future calamity is firmly in the court of the G20 industrial nations. The decision of the US to rejoin the *Paris Agreement* should give impetus to international co-operation and pile peer pressure on

laggards to increase their ambition to reduce emissions.

The fact that the *Paris Agreement* and the *Sendai Framework* exist is proof that the world needs mechanisms for disaster risk governance at the national, regional and global levels in a time of climate emergency.

There are many positive signs that when risk governance is strengthened at national level, encouraging results begin to flow. International support over the last 50 years has made it possible for the government of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society to reduce the death toll from cyclones dramatically.

Events that once cost hundreds of thousands of lives now result in very small numbers of deaths, thanks to an efficient community-based cyclone preparedness programme that operates at national level. In addition, early warning systems across Africa have been successful in staving off the prospect of large-

The Earth is on a fast track to becoming a toxic petri dish where extreme weather events flourish and biological hazards can thrive

scale famine driven by drought and food insecurity.

Many of these advances were made possible because the will of the national governments to improve their risk governance was matched by international co-operation, for instance the development of early warning systems and the provision of climate services through the World Meteorological Organisation’s network of national meteorological services.

This year will see a wave of investment by a world trying to recover, with trillions of dollars in fiscal stimulus. This investment can lay the foundations for a new world order based on the values of resilience, sustainability and equity, one that recognises the true value of nature.

Along with the regional platforms on DRR, there will be major gatherings on climate and biodiversity this year. These will be occasions to strengthen disaster risk governance through improved international co-operation on reducing and eliminating drivers of existential risk including biodiversity loss and environmental degradation.

This year’s International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction on October 13 will focus on enhancing international co-operation for DRR: one of the seven global targets of the *Sendai Framework*.

The countries that are most at risk, including small island developing states and the least developed countries, cannot strengthen their risk governance without international co-operation.

This, combined with stronger global risk governance, is key to recovering from the pandemic in a more resilient, greener and more equitable way.

Time is running out in the race to avert true catastrophe. We must intensify our DRR efforts if we are to transform the present into the future that we want.

## Author



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