



# MEETING NOTE

## Open Dialogue on Science for Development in the Context of COVID-19

co-hosted by the Canadian  
Institutes of Health Research and  
the UN Office for Partnerships

January 29, 2021  
10:00 am–12:00 pm ET



**United  
Nations**

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# Contents

Summary of Meeting.....2

Welcome: Ms. Annemarie Hou, Acting Executive Director, UN Office for Partnerships.....3

Opening remarks: Ambassador Bob Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York .....3

Presentation: Professor Steven J Hoffman, Scientific Director, CIHR Institute of Population & Public Health.....4

Remarks by Her Excellence Amina J Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General and Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group .....4

Discussion 1 – How can science contribute to recovering more equitably, resiliently and sustainably from the COVID-19 pandemic? .....5

Discussion 2 – What are the best strategies for improving collaboration among the world’s research funding agencies, research institutions and the United Nations? .....7

Concluding Remarks: Ms. Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Science .....10

Closing: Ms. Annemarie Hou, Acting Executive Director, UN Office for Partnerships.....10

Appendix A – Agenda .....12

Appendix B – Additional remarks.....13

## Summary of Meeting

### Background

In November 2020, the United Nations released the [UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery: Leveraging the Power of Science for a More Equitable, Resilient and Sustainable Future](#). The *Roadmap* outlines how the full power of research can be harnessed to inform recovery from COVID-19 in a way that leaves no one behind. The *Roadmap* includes 25 research priorities for socio-economic recovery from COVID-19 and provides an overview of science strategies for a better recovery as well as actions that researchers, research funding agencies, governments, civil society organizations and UN entities can take to act upon it.

### Objective

Building on the *UN Research Roadmap*, an Open Dialogue event was held on January 29, 2021, and brought heads of research funding agencies together with UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed to discuss how the global research community can collaborate on recovery research during the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the *Decade for Action* to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This Open Dialogue provided heads of research funding agencies and representatives of Member States with a unique opportunity to interact with the UN.

### Participants

The two-hour online event was facilitated by Ms. Annemarie Hou, Acting Executive Director of the UN Office for Partnerships, and was co-moderated by Professor Steven J. Hoffman, Scientific Director of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Population & Public Health – who lead the development of the *UN Research Roadmap* – and Mr. Christian Salazar Volkmann, Director, UN Development Coordination Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. The UN Deputy Secretary-General served as the event's Honorary Chair.

The dialogue took place virtually and was attended by over 100 representatives from research funding organizations, UN Member States and heads of relevant UN entities. Among those in attendance were the heads of many of the research funding agencies that participated in the *UN Research Roadmap's* five steering groups. Participation in the event was by invitation-only to heads of research funding agencies, member states, and UN entities; however, the event was live-streamed on the UN Web TV and recorded so that other research funding agency staff, researchers and policymakers could benefit from the discussions both during and after.

### Format

The event was designed as a global conversation. Following opening remarks from the Ambassador Bob Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN in New York, and from UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, two conversations were led by the two moderators. The first conversation, moderated by Professor Hoffman, focused on how science can contribute to recovering more equitably, resiliently and sustainably from the COVID-19 pandemic. The second conversation, moderated by Mr. Salazar Volkmann,

focused on strategies for improving collaboration among the world's research funding agencies, research institutions, and the UN. See [Appendix A](#) for a detailed agenda.

## Welcome: Ms. Annemarie Hou, Acting Executive Director, UN Office for Partnerships

After welcoming all the distinguished speakers and participants, Ms. Hou remarked that COVID-19 is a global health, socio-economic and humanitarian crisis that has exposed inequalities in sectors and regions around the world. The pandemic has also made evident the need for transformation guided by science. The *UN Research Roadmap*, released in November 2020, built on the UN Secretary-General's *Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19* and provides a guide to ensure that science works in solidarity towards an equitable recovery for the benefit of all using international collaboration through the power of science.

Ms. Hou reiterated UN Secretary-General António Guterres's message to Member States on his 2021 priorities: "science is succeeding, but solidarity is failing." Judging by the number and variety of participants in the Open Dialogue, Ms. Hou hoped that this event would ensure that science and solidarity succeed for people and for the planet. The day's events provided a rare opportunity for a conversation about how we can collaborate on COVID-19 recovery efforts through global research in support of the *Decade of Action* to deliver the SDGs in a way that includes as many diverse voices as possible.

## Opening remarks: Ambassador Bob Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York

Ambassador Rae thanked the UN Office for Partnerships and the CIHR for their support in organizing this timely and topical event and stressed the need for a stronger partnership between science, political will and global collaboration in order to facilitate the movement from ideas to policy. He stated that science is the lynch pin of the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery and that science has already contributed to important advancements in diagnostics, treatments and vaccines. Nevertheless, there must be a link between these achievements and our political willingness to move forward with sufficient, equitable and sustainable global recovery efforts that will help us to get back on track towards addressing the SDGs.

Ambassador Rae continued that Canada is proud to have been asked to lead this effort, but in fact, many researchers from around the world had contributed to the *UN Research Roadmap* and this event, and Canada is delighted to have had the opportunity to work with so many other countries and the UN to help to bolster the power of science in achieving the SDGs. While this is an enormous opportunity for researchers, policymakers, governments and the UN to work together, it is also essential that we reflect on how we can turn the discussion into action.

## **Presentation: Professor Steven J Hoffman, Scientific Director, CIHR Institute of Population & Public Health**

Professor Hoffman provided a short presentation on the *UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery*. The *Roadmap* provides a framework for leveraging the power of science in support of a better socio-economic recovery and a more equitable, resilient and sustainable future. Developed with input from five steering groups, 270 experts and five scoping reviews, the *Roadmap* identifies 25 research priorities across five pillars, a framework for understanding the challenges and opportunities ahead and five science strategies to address the full research eco system. It is a commitment and a guide to make use of research to determine how COVID-19 socio-economic recovery efforts can be purposefully designed to stimulate equity, resilience, sustainability and progress towards the SDGs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the need for ambitious plans that reimagine and transform health, social and economic systems so they leave no one behind. Science can help to identify and inform the implementation of transformative solutions and can act as a guiding force to a more equitable and sustainable future. We must aim for a quadruple bottom line from COVID-19 wherein recovery efforts are equitable, resilient and sustainable. Key actions must be taken by researchers, research funding agencies and governments and civil society organizations and today's event is an opportunity to identify how we can make good on the promise of a science-led recovery.

## **Remarks by Her Excellence Amina J Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General and Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group**

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed thanked the previous speakers, the organizers and the authors of and contributors to the *UN Research Roadmap* for the excellent work they had accomplished in record time. She noted that we are at a fork in the road – we are in both pandemic response and recovery mode and our work will be essential to move forward. Stressing the importance of equity, she emphasized the involvement of all fields of science and the need to fully involve – not just engaging, but involving – stakeholders at all levels, especially the grass roots in implementation efforts.

The Deputy Secretary-General pointed out the far-reaching socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and how these impacts have disproportionately affected the most marginalized, pushing more than 70 million extra people into poverty. Low- and middle-income countries are facing huge inequities and ongoing advancements towards the SDGs are extremely fragile.

The *UN Research Roadmap* will be essential to mobilize and inspire a coordinated effort at the country level using multiple and rigorous science-informed strategies grounded in an ambitious socio-economic response. As of January 2021, 118 government and country teams have developed economic response plans. The UN is supporting socio-economic response plans in 75 countries.

Much of the initial focus of the pandemic response has been on the immediate development of treatments and vaccines, however it is time that we harness and direct the power of science towards urgent socio-economic issues caused by the pandemic. COVID-19 has made it evident that we need to build a new, transformative future that places priority on equity, resilience and sustainability. The *UN Research Roadmap* embeds interdisciplinary research into the design and implementation of socio-economic recovery efforts including at the community level. The Deputy Secretary-General emphasized that the needs of women, who are particularly affected by the economic and social consequences of the pandemic, must be prioritized.

The *UN Research Roadmap* bridges the research and policy gap and offers ways to co-create solutions that will address common goals. She concluded by noting that today's discussion is the beginning of a conversation that will allow research funders, partners and the UN to work collaboratively to mobilize research in a way that supports coordinated efforts that feed directly into implementation strategies focused on the work of countries and communities.

## **Discussion 1 – How can science contribute to recovering more equitably, resiliently, and sustainably from the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**Moderated by Professor Steven J Hoffman**

### **A) Professor Jeremy Farrar – Director, Wellcome, UK**

Pointing to the wide-reaching consequences of COVID-19, Professor Farrar stated he was delighted to see the UN engaging with the research community. He reminded everyone that while science is the exit strategy to the current and future global challenges, it is crucial to ensure the science is equitably available to everyone in the world. We must come together to leverage all sciences and turn the *UN Research Roadmap* into action.

### **B) Professor Nisia Trindade Lima – President, FIOCRUZ - Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, Brazil**

Professor Lima emphasized that global solidarity and innovation are required to tackle the challenges of the pandemic and improve the lives of the most marginalized. The research priorities and scientific strategies outlined in the *UN Research Roadmap* will guide FIOCRUZ's work and in the near future FIOCRUZ hopes to share a Portuguese version of the *Roadmap*. FIOCRUZ is working to ensure equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccine and is contributing to diverse research activities that address all pillars.

### **C) Professor Virendra Kumar Malhotra – Member Secretary, Indian Council of Social Sciences Research, India**

Professor Malhotra stated that the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research is pleased to have contributed to the development of the *UN Research Roadmap* and is particularly interested in the discussion of "science of science". The Indian research community has expressed significant interest and engagement on many of the research priorities outlined in the document. Issues of resilience and sustainability can be addressed, especially when the whole world is concentrated on addressing the issue of equity.



**D) Ambassador Mohamed Edrees – Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations**

Accentuating the role science and technology play in addressing current and future challenges, Ambassador Edrees highlighted the need to ensure solutions and technology are locally applicable and locally generated. Success stories and solutions must be shared so that all can benefit from the lessons learned. The UN can play an important role in harnessing expertise, identifying solutions and sharing them with local communities and country representatives.

**E) Dr. Ted Hewett – President, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canada**

The *UN Research Roadmap* is focused on the importance of collaboration and the critical role of social sciences and humanities to rebuild better in the aftermath to recover more equitably, resiliently and sustainably, Dr. Hewett stated. SSHRC is committed to advancing the agenda laid out in the *Roadmap*. They are working closely with the Trans-Atlantic Platform for Social Sciences and Humanities to launch a signature initiative associated with the *UN Research Roadmap* and, in Canada, the Canada Coordinating Research Committee is collaborating on a transdisciplinary research funding program.

**F) Ambassador Luis Ugarelli – Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations**

Identifying the importance of science to building back better, Ambassador Ugarelli highlighted a number of ways Peru is engaging and mobilizing science and innovation in response to COVID-19. He emphasized the importance of taking each country's specific situation into account when identifying and developing strategies to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. Effectiveness of financing strategies, debt relief, foreign direct investments, and official development assistance can be improved for a fairer, greener, more sustainable global economy.

**G) Professor Katja Becker – President, DFG/German Research Foundation, Germany**

Signalling a clear commitment to science driven approach to dealing with COVID-19, Professor Becker announced that the Interdisciplinary Commission for Research on Pandemics and the German Committee Future Earth, both set up by the DFG, have published joint statements in order to share the goals and values of the *UN Research Roadmap*. She emphasized that curiosity-driven research can provide help to prevent crises and contribute to more resilient societies. Organizations such as the Global Research Council can help to ensure equitable and sustainable frameworks for global collaboration and shared understanding of scientific and funding practices.

**H) Response from UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J Mohammed**

The Deputy Secretary-General highlighted three things that should be considered when planning for recovery. First, she stressed the importance of paying attention to local levels of government and ensuring academic partnerships are connected to local communities and committed to long-term relationships. She reminded participants that engagement with civil society includes community-based organizations of all sizes. Second, she highlighted the importance of listening to and building leadership capacity among young people and women;

and third, she noted that she was looking forward to hearing more about how we can bring research and evidence into context on the ground. Today's conflict and humanitarian crises settings are incredibly complex, and science can not only support efforts to address current challenges but can also inform sustained peace and recovery.

**I) Professor Charu Kaushic – Chair, GloPID-R Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness**

Professor Kaushic introduced GloPID-R, an international network of 29 research funding organizations that invest in research preparedness and response to infectious disease epidemics and highlighted ways it has coordinated the global research response to COVID-19. Notably, GloPID-R worked with the WHO to set out COVID-19 research priorities in the 2019 Coordinated Global Research Roadmap in February 2020 and continues to partner with UKCDR and others to track more than 5,500 COVID-19 research projects (\$3 billion USD) funded since early 2020.

**J) Mr. Jason Mack – Counselor for Economic and Social Affairs, Permanent Mission of the United States of America to the United Nations**

Mr Mack emphasized that the United States is committed to making evidence-based decisions guided by the best-available science and data and that research is essential to developing medical countermeasures and identifying risk and protective factors so people can modify their behaviours and environments to protect themselves. He highlighted the United States participation in the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator and COVAX facility and looks forward to working together with scientists, researchers, and innovators to build the capacity needed to prevent, detect, report and respond to infectious disease threats.

**K) Ms. Gunilla Olsson – Director, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti**

Focusing her remarks on the need to better understand how to strengthen social protection systems, Ms. Olsson stated that the rollout of the *UN Research Roadmap* should prioritize research that generates evidence to strengthen social protection systems strengthening and moves from a focus on retrospective evaluation to research that can inform the development of domestically financed and sustainable systems. One entry point for closer collaboration between the research entities could be a combined and complementary capacity to generate evidence that informs common country analysis, the content of UN cooperation frameworks and the UN country teams.

**Discussion 2 – What are the best strategies for improving collaboration among the world's research funding agencies, research institutions and the United Nations?**

**Moderated by Christian Salazar Volkmann**

In opening the second dialogue, moderator Mr. Salazar Volkmann emphasized cooperation between funders, researchers, the UN and the people they serve and a focus on impact. He also stressed the importance of building a global research framework tied to a global response framework and an institutional structure that is all about collaboration on the ground. The *UN Research Roadmap* and this dialogue will bring together these many players to create synergy and a “virtuous cycle” by generating research questions informed by



implementation and that people on the ground are involved in a recovery informed by research.

**A) Professor Ottoline Leyser – Chief Executive, UK Research and Innovation, United Kingdom**

Highlighting that the pandemic has illustrated how power of people and communities to effect change rapidly and collaboratively, Professor Leyser stated that the phrase “build forward better” is perhaps preferable to “build back better” as it reflects the idea of transformative change rather than a slightly upgraded version of “business as usual”. Professor Leyser emphasized the science and innovation community has an opportunity to learn from the pandemic and explore new and alternative ways to design research communities and research systems where everyone can participate, and everyone can benefit. Through collaborations and dialogues such as this the global research community can identify how to better connect discovery and prosperity and support the kinds of research and innovation needed to deliver the SDGs.

**B) Dr. Jemimah Onsare – Acting Chief Executive Officer, National Research Fund, Kenya**

The Kenyan National Research Fund supports research to achieve the SDGs, said Dr. Onsare. It is important to map what is happening over the world so we know where we stand in tackling current challenges and how funding agencies can collaborate in areas of interest. Kenya supports the role of the UN as a central platform where all funding agencies come together to share in collaborative outcomes and determine how our work can best be taken back to the grassroots. She concluded by stressing the need to come together to tackle shared challenges and the need to embrace science diplomacy. As funding agencies, we need to map what is happening so we can gauge where we are and collaborate on areas of interest.

**C) Response from UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J Mohammed**

The Deputy Secretary-General reiterated the importance of the SDGs as a framework for addressing the current crisis and recovering from it. She stressed that co-creation is extremely important especially partnerships that honour Indigenous knowledge and include local communities, young people and women. She also stated that technology is an important component of the scientific strategies laid out in the *UN Research Roadmap* and that there is a clear need for shared baseline data and data platforms that are interoperable so that data can be shared. In conclusion the Deputy Secretary-General thanked everyone for their attendance and engagement with the *Roadmap* and looks forward to coming together again to take stock of how we are moving forward, together.

**D) Mr. Ivan Konstantinopolskiy – First Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations**

Mr. Konstantinopolskiy stated that Russia supports valuable dialogue with the scientific community and appreciates that the *UN Research Roadmap* highlights areas such as universal health coverage, social protection and environmental determinants of health. He commented that the *Roadmap* largely addresses social and economic science and does not sufficiently highlight the huge potential of research in other realms of science. He said not all

countries were included, in particular countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In addition, the needs of people living in countries under unilateral or coercive measures are not addressed.

**E) Ambassador João Genésio de Almeida – Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations**

Ambassador Almeida shared that the Brazilian science and technology and innovation ecosystem responded quickly to the pandemic. He stressed the importance of education, infrastructure and support for new and innovative concepts, in particular, we must invest in life-long education and digital literacy with focus on women and girls and ensure equitable access to technology. The UN must lead by example and reevaluate how linkages between science, technology and development are discussed via existing groups such as the Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum) and the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD). The appointment of a Special Envoy on Technology can help to provide cohesion to these efforts.

**F) Dr. Soumya Swaminathan – Chief Scientist, World Health Organization**

Focusing her remarks on collaboration, benefits sharing and governance, Dr. Swaminathan emphasized the need to ensure that the benefits of research are equitably distributed and that the models of global collaboration that have merged in response to COVID-19 should also be employed to combat problems like tuberculosis. She also stressed the importance collaboration between the UN, Member States and research funding organizations to ensure rapid and equitable data sharing. Finally, she encouraged these same actors to come together to establish global governance mechanisms and standards for the ethical development of new technologies.

**G) Dr. Ranjith Senaratne – Chair, National Science Foundation, Sri Lanka**

Dr. Senaratne highlighted a number of ways the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka has been working to combat COVID-19. For example, a digital platform has been created to make the most of resources available to address high priority research concerns and Sri Lanka has also developed a database of scientists at home and abroad and invited them to contribute to joint research proposals to address high priority concerns.

**H) Ambassador Giovanni Buttigieg – Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations**

In his remarks, Ambassador Buttigieg emphasized that achieving the SDGs cannot happen without science and technology and shared ways that the research community in Malta has been mobilized in response to COVID-19. In Malta, the Minister of Research appointed a steering group for post COVID strategy, and the Malta Council for Science and Technology and the Malta Enterprise corporation created a COVID-19 research and development fund. Reinvigorating multi-lateral collaboration will be key to overcoming global challenges including climate change and achieving the SDGs.

#### **I) Ms. Tahmina Hasanova – Attaché, Permanent Mission of Tajikistan to the United Nations**

Ms. Hasanova stated that COVID-19 requires international solidarity and cooperation more than ever and Tajikistan supports the *UN Research Roadmap* and continued productive and useful dialogue.

#### **J) Dr. Kristin Danielsen – Executive Director, Research Council of Norway**

Providing an update on an initiative of the Global Research Council, Dr. Danielsen stated that the global SDG funding pilot involves 18 international funding agencies aims to develop a funding mechanism to advance knowledge-based and innovative implementation of the SDGs locally and regionally. Projects will include researchers, stakeholders from government, industry and NGOs and at least one partner country should be a Development Assistance Country (DAC)-listed country. The operator and secretariat of the pilot will be the National Research Foundation of South Africa.

#### **Conclusion of second discussion**

Mr. Salazar Volkmann concluded the second discussion by identifying the importance of co-creating and moving the discussion “downward” as key themes from the conversation. In response to the Deputy Secretary-General’s request, he also committed to find ways to continue to check-in on progress on the *UN Research Roadmap*.

#### **Concluding Remarks: Ms. Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Science**

In her concluding remarks, Ms. Nair-Bedouelle stressed the importance of open science and solidarity. She emphasized the value of sharing data between researchers and citizens, and between countries around the world. UNESCO has been working with stakeholders across the world to bring together different knowledge streams to understand the role of science today. Building back better will require all sciences and the whole world to come together and it is imperative that open data and open science are at the core of those collaborations. Knowledge and technologies generated by science must be made equitably available to countries and communities around the world. Concluding the event, Ms. Nair-Bedouelle called on participants to “walk the talk” of solidarity and multilateralism and global support knowledge exchange and capacity building. Without further action, the SDGs will not become a reality.

#### **Closing: Ms. Annemarie Hou, Acting Executive Director, UN Office for Partnerships**

Ms. Hou closed the event by thanking Ms. Nair-Bedouelle for her impassioned call to solidarity, and all the participants for a dynamic and productive conversation. She emphasized that science is our best chance for a just recovery, especially if we can work together to turn commitments into action.

In follow-up to the meeting, participants who were unable to speak due to time constraints were invited to share written remarks with the co-hosts. Summaries of those remarks are included in **Appendix B**.

## Appendix A – Agenda

**Open Dialogue on Science for Development in the Context of COVID-19**  
co-hosted by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and UN Office for Partnerships

Date: January 29, 2021  
Time: 10:00 am-12:00 pm ET

### Agenda

10:02	<b>Welcome and Introduction</b> – Annemarie Hou
10:05	<b>Opening remarks from H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations</b>
10:08	<b>Overview of the <i>UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery</i></b> – Steven J Hoffman
10:20	<b>Dialogue on how science can contribute to recovering more equitably, resiliently and sustainably from the COVID-19 pandemic</b> – <i>moderated by Steven J Hoffman</i>
10:30	<b>Remarks from Her Excellence UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J Mohammed</b>
10:35	<b>Dialogue</b> , continued
11:00	<b>Open Dialogue on Strategies for improving collaboration among the world's research funding agencies, research institutions, and the United Nations</b> – <i>moderated by Christian Salazar-Volkman</i>
11:40	<b>Concluding remarks from Ms Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Science</b>
11:43	<b>Summary and wrap-up</b> – Annemarie Hou

## Appendix B – Additional remarks

### Dr. Jean Lebel – President, International Development Research Centre, Canada

Over the last year, the International Development Research Centre has put partnership at the heart of our work to support researchers in the Global South and to invest in solutions that will both prevent and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. In April 2020, IDRC pivoted to mobilize approximately half of our new research funding towards seven initiatives that will help address knowledge gaps in different dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic. We worked with Canada's National Research Councils to support medical and public health countermeasures, bringing our focus on low and middle -income countries. With the United Kingdom, Sweden, South Africa and other international funders, we invested in strengthening African science systems' responses to COVID. With Sweden, we supported building responsible AI and data science approaches to support COVID-19 response and recovery. And we improved the quality and equity of education and on-line learning during the pandemic with support from the Global Partnership for Education and the IDRC-led Knowledge Innovation Exchange. On our own, we also supported rapid research to inform public policy and build equitable social and economic response and recovery, to inform the provision of health services for refugees and displaced populations and prevent COVID-19, and to alleviate the impacts of the pandemic on food insecurity. Together these seven initiatives have addressed key priorities across all five pillars of the *UN Research Roadmap*, while contributing to the broader emphasis on strengthening science systems. Building on this work, in the coming year IDRC will be investing in research on one health and health systems for epidemic preparedness and response. And we will continue to foster, international collaboration and coordination among research funders – key to preventing and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 and to tackling the significant development challenges that are blocking our attainment of the SDGs – chief among them, gender and other inequalities, and climate change.