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COVID-19: The lessons learnt we have not always been willing to take on board;

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Epidemics and pandemics have different profiles. Some are relatively easily managed while others have as yet no known treatment protocols. Some involve diseases that are highly contagious, while others do not. With some, a heavy viral load is needed if the disease is to cause serious illness or death, while with others any contact with the pathogen is immediately fatal. Finally, the profile and progress of diseases associated with water are rather different from those of diseases of the respiratory system which are disseminated by airborne particles. Over the years, a series of key lessons have been learnt from Ebola, cholera and other large scale health crisis. The most important one is that health crisis cannot be approached solely through a medical response. Proper management of these large scale health crises should be based on four pillars: a crisis management pillar, a medical pillar, a logistical one and finally a communication pillar. This principle was largely forgotten, resulting in largely ineffective response strategies, and thus a pandemic that went largely out of control.

The repercussion of this situation is devastating. More than ever, the current health crisis has repercussions well beyond the health sector, affecting society as a whole, encompassing interpersonal relationships, economics, food security, governance, politics and even international relations. Health emergencies in recent years have increased the need for stronger interventions in the health sector. However, there has been little improvement in the capacity of affected countries to meet that need. New modalities of intervening were required. But surprisingly, the most affected countries are some of the richest countries, with sophisticated health systems.

In the health sector, key principles learnt comprise the importance of proper warning systems to put the health sector in crisis mode, credible alert and prevention messages for the population, strategic approach to the management of movements of people and goods and finally, a special attention for the protection of the first line responders who are both key to the response and possible contaminators.

Yet managing the unknown will probably be remembered as the most difficult tasks in the COVID 19 crisis management. This is where political courage had to be fiercely demonstrated.

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Biography:

François Grünewald: Agricultural Engineer, he has been working for more than 35 years in the solidarity sector. After various positions at UN, ICRC and NGOs, he was CEO of Groupe URD (www.urd.org) before becoming Director of "foresight and strategy". He leads research and evaluations for humanitarian programmes and risk management preparedness in Africa, Latin America, the Caucasus, Asia and the Middle East) for donors Red Cross, UN and NGOs. Associate professor at the University of Paris XII and lecturer in various institutions in Europe, as well as in Canada and the United States, he is also a author of numerous articles, and editor for several books. He is currently in charge of the Covid 19 Observatory (<https://www.urd.org/en/project/covid-19-observatory/>)