

5 things COVID-19 has taught us about fighting climate change

► The immediate crisis we are facing today has much to teach us about an even more existential threat: climate change.

► We have no time to wait - but, as COVID-19 has shown, we do have the means to meet this challenge.



The California wildfires are a vivid reminder that climate change is here to stay - Image: REUTERS/Adrees Latif

Climate change is happening right before our eyes; Bangladesh is underwater¹, the Arctic is burning, and California's devastating wildfires continue to spread. We have no more time to wait – but we do have the power to change course before it's too late.

As we face down a number of intertwined crises – from health and the economy to inequality and leadership – now is the time for businesses to reassess their values and think about how to become more responsible and sustainable. We must ask ourselves where we can have the most influence – and then we must act, so that we can start driving towards a healthier and more resilient future. Solving the climate crisis will address inequality and racism, strengthen the economy, and promote global health. But the clock is ticking. Failure to address the climate crisis at the scale and speed necessary threatens the future of humanity.

Here are five lessons COVID-19 has taught us about tackling climate change.

1. The planet will not wait

The science community has been warning about the risk of a viral pandemic, and the risk of climate change² for far too long. At our current rate of global greenhouse gas emissions, we will miss our 1.5°C target and head instead towards a 3-4°C rise in temperature³. And while emissions are projected to be 7% lower in 2020 than in 2019⁴, the cost has been tremendous.

¹ <https://time.com/5863684/greta-thunberg-diary-climate-crisis/>

² <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/science-and-technology/2020/04/experts-warned-of-pandemic-decades-ago-why-werent-we-ready>

³ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1052171>

⁴ <https://time.com/5864374/coronavirus-carbon-emissions/>

As Bill Gates writes⁵:

“What’s remarkable is not how much emissions will go down because of the pandemic, but how little.”

We need to set bold and ambitious targets to drive change the planet needs. Coming out of the COVID-19 crisis, *we have an opportunity to combine a safe recovery with a sustainable recovery*. The EU has led the way by proposing a green recovery plan⁶, which will use digitalization to boost jobs and growth, secure the resilience of societies, and put the health of our environment first.

2. We’re more resilient when we work together

When faced with the unprecedented social conditions imposed as a result of the pandemic, people stepped up to the plate, embracing new working arrangements and personal hardships, and reminding us that *the human capacity for resilience is astounding*.

As climate change continues to advance and our resilience is put to the test, it is clear we will only come through this by working together. Meaningful partnerships and policy work are needed to push the needle forward. Organizations like the *Step Up Coalition*⁷, which Salesforce helped spearhead, bring together companies dedicated to using their influence to collaborate on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Adversity prompts innovation

Throughout the crisis, we have seen accelerated leaps forward in innovative solutions – from the quick development of ‘track and trace’ apps⁸ to help stem the spread of the virus, to tech to help us get back to work.

Similarly, innovation is also key to taking on climate change. We’ve seen global brands like *Adidas* sparking new solutions to plastic pollution⁹ through their collaboration with *Parley*, making shoes with plastic waste found in the ocean.

Organizations like *Arbor Day* are also innovating – bringing their network of environmentalists online for moments in time that have always been focused in nature, like their *Arbor Day at Home* campaign¹⁰.

Now is the time for all organizations to step up and use their unique superpowers and innovate.

The upwards and accelerating trend in annual global temperature rises is clear :

⁵ gatesnotes.com/Energy/Climate-and-COVID-19

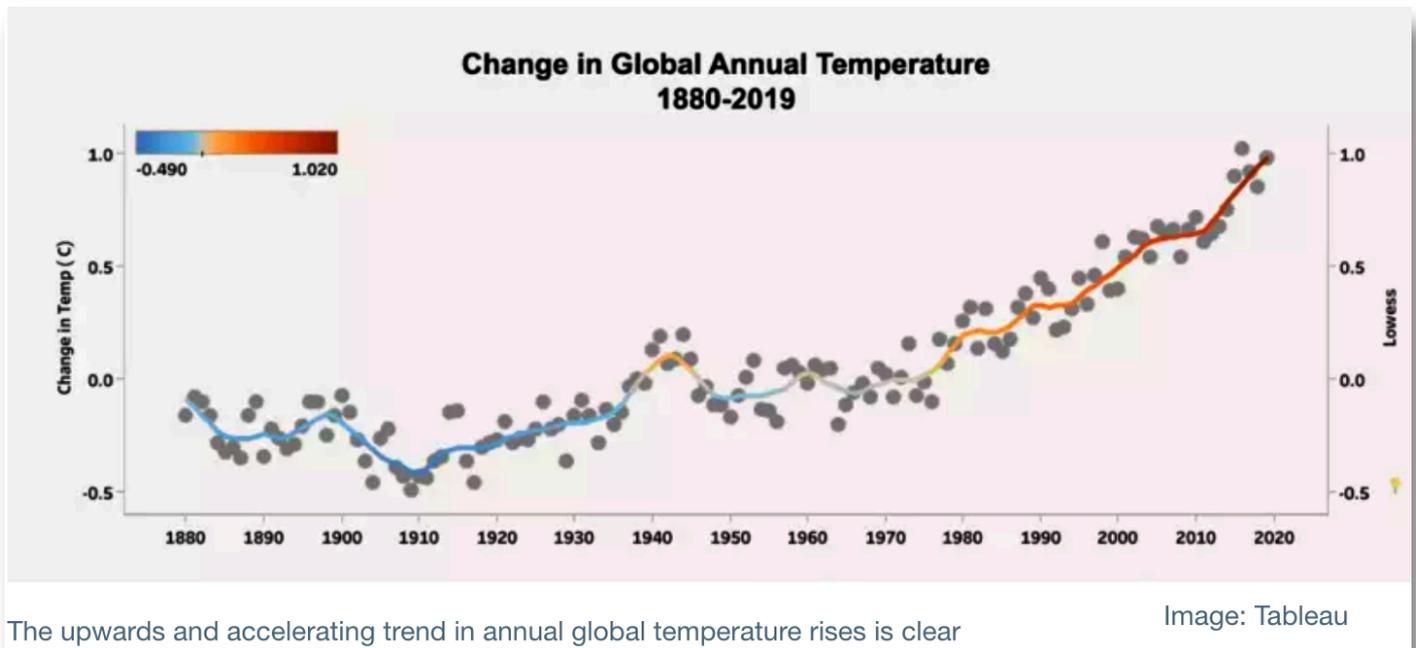
⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940

⁷ <https://stepupdeclaration.org/thecoalition>

⁸ <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/05/07/1000961/launching-mittr-covid-tracing-tracker/>

⁹ <https://www.salesforce.org/blog/our-defining-decade-parley-for-the-oceans/>

¹⁰ <https://www.salesforce.com/company/news-press/stories/2020/4/salesforce-earth-day/>



4. Digital is imperative

As a result of the pandemic, digital transformation is happening at hyper-speed. Seemingly overnight, every company was forced to either go fully digital or shut down completely.

The crisis has massively disrupted industries and sectors. Travel came to a full stop¹¹, events will in all likelihood remain virtual until well into 2021, and schools everywhere are grappling with how to bring students back to the classroom safely.

The pandemic exposed the need for cloud-based solutions, and solidified the trend that cloud computing is here to stay.

Earlier this year, the World Economic Forum¹² launched Uplink¹³ – a digital crowdsourcing platform that brings together stakeholders of all sizes to take on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by using digitalization to reach a wider pool of funds and ideas. The product was the result of a one-year collaboration between the Forum, Salesforce, Deloitte and Microsoft, and was launched with the Ocean Solutions Sprint¹⁴, which sourced more than 50 entrepreneurial solutions from more than 15 countries in response to the most pressing challenges facing the ocean today.

The platform has now shifted towards meeting the Trillion Tree goal¹⁵. With more than 250 submissions to-date, I am excited to learn how the next generation of change-makers will address this global tree challenge¹⁶.

¹¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/06/coronavirus-pandemics-impact-on-travel-tourism-in-5-charts.html>

¹² <https://www.weforum.org/>

¹³ <https://www.weforum.org/uplink>

¹⁴ <https://uplink.weforum.org/uplink/s/topic/0TO2o00000VefpGAC/ocean>

¹⁵ <https://uplink.weforum.org/uplink/s/uplink-issue/a002o00000vOf09AAC/trillion-trees>

¹⁶ www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Uplink_Trillion_Trees_Challenge_page_2020.pdf

5. Leaders must be bold and transparent

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the importance of transparency in building trust. Leaders are facing a trust crisis and are under public scrutiny like never before. Local governments, cities and businesses have taken responding to COVID-19 into their own hands, tracking infection rates and setting restrictions at a local level.

Similarly strong leadership will be needed to tackle climate change. We have already seen the power of local-level leadership when combating the climate crisis, and there have been plenty of examples in the business world¹⁷ worth celebrating, too. Mastercard have created the Priceless Planet Coalition¹⁸, a platform to unite corporate sustainability efforts and make meaningful investments to preserve the environment. Unilever has implemented an impressive environmental policy¹⁹ to “decouple their growth from their environmental footprint”.

The pandemic has highlighted which businesses are most engaged with all their stakeholders. These are the companies the world is looking to, and who are ready to show how to make real changes to secure a sustainable, resilient future.

What's the World Economic Forum doing about climate change?

Climate change poses an urgent threat demanding decisive action. Communities around the world are already experiencing increased climate impacts, from droughts to floods to rising seas. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report continues to rank these environmental threats at the top of the list.

To limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C and as close as possible to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, it is essential that businesses, policy-makers, and civil society advance comprehensive near- and long-term climate actions in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lux6fThkSW4&feature=youtu.be>

Global warming can be beaten thanks to this simple plan²⁰

¹⁷ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielnewman/2020/07/24/how-leading-global-companies-are-using-sustainability-as-a-market-differentiator/#4871f3431ff3>

¹⁸ <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20200117005087/en/Mastercard-Partners-Launch-Priceless-Planet-Coalition-Act>

¹⁹ <https://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/>

²⁰ <https://www.weforum.org/videos/global-warming-can-be-beaten-thanks-to-this-simple-plan-da85429196>

The World Economic Forum's Climate Initiative²¹ supports the scaling and acceleration of global climate action through public and private-sector collaboration. The *Initiative* works across several workstreams to develop and implement inclusive and ambitious solutions.

This includes the *Alliance of CEO Climate Leaders*, a global network of business leaders from various industries developing cost-effective solutions to transitioning to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy. CEOs use their position and influence with policy-makers and corporate partners to accelerate the transition and realize the economic benefits of delivering a safer climate.

Building a better future

Only through catalyzing global systemic change can we hope to reach a 1.5°C future, and every individual, institution, government and corporation has an essential role to play in that transition.

My advice is to think about what you do best as a company and apply that lens to your climate response. If you're a transportation company, figure out how you can decarbonize distribution and logistics. I have to commend the auto industry for their bold thinking, with some of the world's largest automakers²² making carbon commitments even as they work to build back from the COVID-19 crisis.

If your secret sauce is innovation, how can you catalyze more *clean-tech*? Or, if you're skilled at supply chain management, how can you help others bring forward transparency and efficiency that lowers the negative environmental impact to your procurement?

Now is the time to act, to reimagine the business of business, and to ensure that global economic recovery creates a new normal that betters the planet for all. We need bold ambition – not incremental changes – to radically disrupt industries and create the change the planet needs.

□ This article was originally published by the Salesforce Newsroom²³.

Have you read?

- [3 leadership lessons from the age of coronavirus](#)
- [5 lessons Salesforce learned crafting responsible technology guidelines during COVID-19](#)
- [Climate change after COVID-19: Harder to defeat politically, easier to tackle economically](#)

[Contact us](#) to get involved.

²¹ <https://www.weforum.org/our-impact/accelerating-climate-action>

²² <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/bmw-ford-other-automakers-rev-carbon-commitments>

²³ <https://www.salesforce.com/company/news-press/stories/2020/8/salesforce-sustainability/>