I have always thought that if there is a god, she must have a deep sense of irony.

COVID-19 showcases that. We know that as individuals we must “shelter in place” and step back to keep ourselves safe. Yet at the same time, we as a community need to step forward to keep others safe, including people who we do not know and may never meet. Science tells us that. Economics tell us that. And values, ethics and morality tell us that.
But will we?

The health of someone working in a food market in a faraway place can devastate the whole world. A stranger's health risk is our health risk. It was always so – and is now on display clearly. Our global public health system is only as good as the weakest link.

And the weakest links are shockingly weak. More than 50 per cent of the world’s rural population and 20 per cent of the urban population lack institutional [healthcare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Healthcare). More than 2.2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water and 4.2 billion lack access to safely managed sanitation – the first lines of defence against disease.

One million people live in the catchment area pooling into Kiwoko Hospital in rural Uganda, where [Adara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adara) has been working for more than two decades. Close to 10 per cent are [HIV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HIV) positive. An incredible army of 400 clinicians and health workers are preparing for COVID-19 with no mechanical ventilation, limited supplemental oxygen, limited personal protective equipment (PPE), and no proper isolation facilities.

They step forward to face the firestorm that is coming armed with soap and courage, and a lifetime of commitment to serving the poor. In Uganda, there is one intensive care bed per million people – compared with 89 beds per million in Australia.
Our global public health system is only as good as its weakest link.

We find ourselves in a world not just with enormous wealth and income inequality, but with even greater disparities in access to healthcare. When COVID-19 came, the mighty door of the global economy slammed shut, almost without notice. The music stopped. Our neglect of the vulnerable now amplifies the risks of COVID-19 to all of us. If we’re going to stitch back together global supply chains, we need to address growing inequality.

What is one of the most powerful tools we can utilise to overcome COVID-19? Soap! 🧼 Thanks to our supporters, we’ve distributed thousands of bars of soap and established hand-washing facilities to support the communities we work with. Soap is just our first line of defence to stop this virus, but it’s so effective for communities in the developing world.

#COVID19 #WashYourHands #WashingHands #COVID #TakeCareOfYourself #TakeCareOfEachOther #Soap #StopCOVID19 #Coronavirus #PublicHealth #StaySafe #OvercomeCOVID19 #Wash #SafeHands #EndPoverty #Nepal
Our impulse may be to hide – to close our borders – and to worry about the stranger. Yet we need those respirators – that food, the rent from those international students – and we love our adventure travel. People in the developing world must have access to healthcare so that we can have access to them, to their amazing countries, and to their products and services. The health paradox is also an economic paradox.

What will our relationship with the developing world look like as we move into a post-pandemic world? And how should we think about our businesses in that context?

We will focus on systems change, rather than operating in silos. We will create a kinder, fairer, more equal world.

The World Health Organisation tells us: “The first step is to mount the most robust and co-operative health systems response the world has ever seen… The strongest support must be provided to the multilateral effort to suppress transmission … Scientific collaboration …must be promoted.” That’s a far cry from increasing global tension. The rise of nationalism and economic pain may trump wider global imperatives. A reduction of aid to the developing world is likely, just when it is needed most.

But there is good news. When policy is marred by ideology and politics, business has a track record of moving ahead regardless. The purpose of business has already changed forever. Whether it is environmental focus such as pricing carbon, or pledges from the most advantaged at Davos, the Business Roundtable and PIMCO – we entered this decade with the “multi-stakeholder capitalism” banner held high.
Our global public health system is only as good as its weakest link

And in Australia, we see it in practice. Companies are putting the safety of their staff first and the wellbeing of their customers first. Banks, working with regulators, are postponing mortgage repayments. Supermarkets have opened up new delivery options. Manufacturers are pivoting to make PPE, hand sanitisers and ventilators. Donations of product, time, skills – all focused on wider stakeholders.

There is much that business can and will do from here. There will be a need for financing, grant-making, restructuring and massive debt relief. There will be a need to demand from policymakers a huge increase in overseas development assistance. Companies will bring a new focus to their supply chains, and the safety of their teams. We will focus on systems change, rather than operating in silos. We will create a kinder, fairer, more equal world.

As Pralhad Dhakal, our Nepal country director, commented recently: “For the first time, we really are all in this together.” There is no irony in that.

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