

# IEMA

Transforming the world  
to sustainability

# Build Back Better

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Putting sustainability at the  
heart of the recovery



# Introduction

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Many countries including the UK have eased COVID-19 restrictions and put in place measures to enable people to return to work. There will be those for whom the lockdown and the pandemic has taken a terrible toll; the loss of a loved one, the destruction of a business or career, or enforced social isolation which may continue indefinitely. There will be many in our communities who will need our support long after lockdown is completely lifted.

However, as we rebuild our society and economy, we have an opportunity to build back better. We have already seen the benefits, in terms of improved air quality, carbon saved and employee wellbeing - that just one change, working from home, has brought about. Many companies have signalled that they will never go back to requiring staff to commute every day to the office.

These cultural changes have been forced by circumstance at incredible speed. In the same way, we have seen how collaboration – on new ventilators or vaccines – has taken place between the private sector and the scientific community at a pace that would have been considered unachievable even a few months ago. We are learning that, if we have a clear and universally acknowledged goal, change can be more comprehensive, profound and transformative than we could have imagined.

The need to transform to a low-carbon and sustainable economy is just as urgent. The overwhelming scientific and economic evidence

for rapidly addressing a range of sustainability issues such as climate change, plastics and resource use, modern slavery, biodiversity loss, poverty, health, wellbeing and pollution has not changed.

Given the experiences of the BAME community during and since COVID, we must recognise that all of us, including the environment and sustainability sector, need to work hard to reflect modern Britain in the workforce and in all facets of life that have accepted or legitimised a culture of privilege and discrimination.

We must now seize the moment that post-COVID recovery presents us with by ensuring that all of these vital transformations are integrated into the recovery. There is a growing body of evidence that a sustainable, low-carbon future can drive job creation and increase prosperity. Governments and organisations around the world are now far more acutely aware that resilience has to be a central component of business planning. The business case for a rapid transition to a resilient, sustainable, just and equitable future has become stronger than ever. Rather than rebuild what we had, we must build back better.

We do not have to start from scratch. For example, the UK Government has already laid the groundwork in policy and legislation for achieving net zero by 2050, restoring biodiversity and natural capital and creating a circular economy. Countries have collectively committed to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals

by 2030. Now is the time to double down on these commitments and deliver on them across the whole of government, the business community and society.

This will mean directing jobs, training, technology, finance and investment towards programmes and initiatives that will cut carbon emissions, renew our cities, restore natural capital, improve efficiency and build resilience into supply chains. Many of these measures, such as investing in broadband, improving the housing stock and re-training and redeploying workers, will also help to address the sometimes glaring inequalities highlighted by the pandemic.



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah".

Sarah Mukherjee  
IEMA CEO

## Accelerating a green recovery

A green recovery is one that aligns with and accelerates a transition to a low-carbon, circular resource economy. One that protects and restores biodiversity and natural capital, tackles pollution of our air, rivers and seas, puts green spaces at the centre of urban renewal and applies nature-based solutions to address major infrastructure needs.

A green recovery will bring multiple benefits including creating employment opportunities, increasing productivity, building resilience and increasing wellbeing and quality of life.

A sustainable recovery is one that combines a green recovery with delivering broader social value. One that protects human rights, rebuilds human and social capital and addresses systemic inequality. One that leads to a fairer, just and genuinely prosperous society.

# Seize the moment

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## Accelerate the transition to a low-carbon, resilient and sustainable economy.

IEMA considers that the following priorities and actions are necessary to build back better and support this transition:

### 1. Set clear expectations that require and enable sustainability across the public and private sector

- a) Make financial support for companies, sectors and industries 'conditional' - tied to ambitious goals that are consistent with achieving net zero carbon emissions, a circular economy, biodiversity restoration and enhancing natural and social capital.
- b) Urgently implement policies and actions to demonstrate that the UK is a global leader in transitioning to a low-carbon economy across all sectors and industries.
- c) Speed up reforms to the financial system - use green finance requirements and incentives to drive transition to a low-carbon economy and increase investment in clean technology.
- d) Re-balance the tax burden using 'green taxes' on resource use, pollution and harmful activities to rebuild public finances and properly reflect the full environmental costs of actions.
- e) Require organisations to incorporate sustainability targets, plans and reporting into their organisational strategies - tied to long-term climate and environmental goals. Promote or require sustainability leadership and expertise in the boardroom.
- f) Support local governments to develop and implement an integrated carbon, biodiversity and environment plan to achieve sustainability goals.

## 2. Invest in skills, training and jobs that level-up society and address systemic social problems

- a) Immediately invest in sectors and industries that support green jobs such as clean tech, renewable energy, restoration of nature, sustainable tourism, regenerative agriculture, the circular economy and green infrastructure.
- b) Prioritise the retraining of workers in sunset industries towards jobs of the future to ensure a just transition. Focus on shovel-ready schemes that deliver economic benefits such as retrofitting energy efficiency in homes and businesses.
- c) Increase investment in apprenticeships and scale up ambition for training and developing a modern and highly skilled workforce aligned with a sustainable future.
- d) Re-evaluate the importance of key workers and provide greater economic security to the gig economy and lower-paid workers through the employment law, tax and benefits system.
- e) Actively address systemic inequality and poverty, including structural and institutional barriers for women, BAME and other disadvantaged groups.
- f) Set expectations for increasing cultural sensitivity and equitable representation within organisations – including in the environment and sustainability profession.

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## 3. Support placemaking, community connection and wellbeing

- a) Shape and support policies that lock in positive behaviour changes and tipping points such as active travel, outdoor exercise, enjoyment of nature, and remote and flexible working.
- b) Prioritise health, wellbeing and quality of life when planning and investing in urban development and regeneration, and embed into local and national planning policy.
- c) Support and promote localism and community wealth building to speed up the recovery of towns and cities and deliver multiple economic and social benefits.
- d) Encourage flexible and mixed-use buildings when regenerating town centres, to increase resilience to future shocks and transitions.

## 4. Invest in infrastructure that delivers sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes

- a) Invest only in a low-carbon, sustainable future. Spending on infrastructure should be consistent with climate targets and contribute to other sustainability goals. For example, smart transport, integrated net zero energy systems and ultrafast broadband. Fast track the UK Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan.
  - b) Introduce a requirement to actively plan for a circular economy and strengthen infrastructure for recycling and resource recovery.
  - c) Invest in natural capital and low-cost nature-based solutions to increase economic resilience, deliver biodiversity gains and capture and store carbon.
  - d) Strengthen community cohesion and resilience, and foster a greater sense of wellbeing, by prioritising infrastructure development that generates social value now, as well as in the longer term.
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## 5. Support and promote business models and collaborative decision-making that can resolve critical sustainability challenges and trends

- a) Embed sustainability-centered problem solving such as systems thinking, natural capital economics and ethical resilience across government and the wider economy.
- b) Promote sector and cross-sector leadership and collaboration to address complex and interlinked sustainability problems.
- c) Invest in and deploy technologies and innovations that resolve, rather than trade-off, economic, social and environmental objectives.

## How IEMA and its members are supporting the rebuild

IEMA is a professional body with almost 16,000 members in 116 countries. Our members are sustainability experts working in public and private sector roles across a wide range of industries from financial services to development and construction. Through a combination of training programmes, sharing of best practice and thought leadership and advocacy, we work with our members to drive change in areas such as corporate sustainability, climate change and energy, the circular economy, environmental management and impact assessment.

We have a wealth of experience, case studies and insights to support the rebuild.

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