

“Our world has long committed and lived with extracting, now we recognize the importance of intersections across scientific, policy, social and geographic spheres. We need to review the role of nature and natural resources in macroeconomics and trade theories.”

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Image Source: The center of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, on a rainy afternoon. Photography by Nicôlas J.A. Buchoud, 2019, all rights reserved ©.



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Can the COVID-19 pandemic nurture a paradigm shift from extracting to intersecting? A note

Implementing a paradigm shift from a world that has long committed and lived with extracting to a world that recognises the importance of intersections across scientific, policy and geographic spheres and breaking silos is a great project yet one that needs to be carefully substantiated.

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has taught us that we need a more holistic understanding of human beings, how they relate with one another, how they relate with the planet and with the environment. Such awareness has already producing paradigmatic shifts such as in geoscience but not yet within social, human and political science. The world has certainly changed due to pandemic and we especially in the spheres of education, have learned to adapt but there are no definite answers about future policy directions. What we see is instead a lot of unresolved questions, whereas the very notion of paradigm shift is at risk of being overused. It

was coined initially in the context of the history of science to illustrate deep breakthroughs such as the invention of Newtonian mechanics and 'natural philosophy' or of quantum physics. At each step, widely acknowledged assumptions and principles were dismantled by the introduction of radically different perspectives.

The world has not gone through a pandemic on that a massive scale as the Covid-19 one since the Spanish flu of 1918, questioning many of our certainties and highlighting the need for more cross-cutting policy-making. For instance in the early stages of the pandemic, most governments, including in India decided to followed scientific recommendations issued by epidemiologists, which led to long country-wide lockdowns across the globe. Those lockdowns have caused multiple shocks and wounds within the society and the economy, before governments started to realize that what demographers would say about the distribution of our population, in particular dozens of millions of migrant workers, was equally important. Similarly, psychologists could have suggested that despite the closing down of public transportation systems, people would still struggle to reach out to their loved ones and massively leave cities that were no longer offering any chance of a revenue to them. Such painful lessons force us to look at the world and into the future differently which in return, calls to organize and renew intellectual disciplines. Universities and beyond them, think-tanks, are compelled to break away from existing disciplinary boundaries but this does not mean

promoting more interdisciplinarity. This issue has been on the table for decades and it is not the right angle to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and its impacts. The fragility of science to society interface is a much bigger question that has been raised by the notion of planetary boundaries and issues such as the recognition of man-made climate change and ecosystem disruptions. The Covid-19 pandemic crisis shows how much the science to society interface is a critical political and socio-economic component, one that requires fine grain thinking along with a great deal of ambition to break with pre-crisis routines effectively. Intersecting provides a concrete basis to substantiate such a transformation.

We need to go back to the drawing board. We need to review the role of nature and natural resources in macro-economics and trade theories. We need to devise a more holistic view of global solutions to increase the supply of global public goods, cognizant of their impacts on a fragmented global order still based upon nation-states. We need changes not only with the society or in politics, but also within science. At each and every step of such an Intersecting journey, more research will be needed to analyse interlinkages and avoid simplistic views. Regular, positive confrontation and dialogue between research and world transformations will be needed to train future leaders and involve citizens in the making of our common future. It is our common duty to make it happen.