

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE UKI RCEs IN ESD ONLINE FORUM

(Convened: 2.30-4pm, Tuesday 30th June 2020)

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Introduction

The United Kingdom and Ireland (UKI) network of Regional Centres of Expertise (RCEs) in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was initiated in 2019 in response to calls for cross country collaborations in the face of Brexit. A total of six RCEs are involved in this informal network, five of which are based in the United Kingdom: RCE Cymru (Wales), Learning for Sustainability Scotland (RCE Scotland), RCE Severn, RCE East Midlands, RCE London, and the sixth RCE is based in the Republic of Ireland, RCE Dublin. The UK and Ireland have a shared history, and there is a need to safeguard and deepen the warm relationships developed in more recent years across these islands. In relation to this, the UKI RCE network will support the development of partnerships within and across these countries, that offer solidarity and support for UKI RCEs within and beyond Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. The network will share ideas for future work and collaboration, as well as encourage outreaching and the further development of the network.

Attendees

There were 21 participants in the online UKI RCEs forum, which were mainly drawn from the steering committees of partner RCEs across the network.

Key-note Presentation

Dr. Philip Vaughter, United Nations University Institute for Advanced Study of Sustainability, opened with a most interesting keynote presentation entitled: *“The role of RCEs within and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons learned from the HIV pandemic”*. This highlighted the role of RCEs in creating an enabling environment to learn from the past, address the need for systems thinking and to support behavior change through multidisciplinary ‘joined-up’ responses. A copy of this presentation is in the Appendix.

Focus Questions

Three focusing questions were presented for discussion within break-out rooms and at plenary sessions in the June 30th Online Forum, as follows:

- *What are the opportunities and challenges for UKI RCEs within & beyond the COVID-19 pandemic?*
- *What collaboration/s should be prioritized across UKI RCEs in light of opportunities/ challenges in COVID-19 pandemic?*
- *How should the UKI Vision Statement be adapted to reflect UKIs response to COVID-19 pandemic?*

The following sections present an overview of insights, commentary and guidance emergent from small-group and plenary discussions on these key questions.

Focus Question A: *What are the opportunities and challenges for UKI RCEs within and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The Covid-19 pandemic offers opportunity in that our communities have had direct experience of a global crisis – personal experience of empty supermarket shelves, lockdown, recession – which has given citizens some indication of how well they can personally manage and their preparedness (or otherwise) for economic, social, and emotional disruptions caused by global challenge/s. There is an urgent need to capture this learning in and from the COVID-19 crisis, and to explore how learning from COVID-19 can be used to raise awareness and foster action on impending challenges such as Climate Change. The UKI RCEs are likely well-placed to engage in this.

The RCEs within the UKI network have a large membership – a network of networks – that offers huge translational potential in terms of ESD reach into local communities. This also offers important connections to share learning with and from the wider global RCE network. There is a need to recognise and respect that each RCE has different memberships, target communities and differing priorities. In the face of COVID-19, RCEs are well-placed to contribute to the co-creation of a new “normal” within communities. To do so, the RCEs need to foster systems thinking and critical thinking within *head-heart-hands* community-based actions on ESD. They also need to enable better sharing of ‘good practice’ within and across RCE communities. Furthermore, there is recognition that the pandemic is likely to have a negative economic impact globally and this is likely to present on-going funding challenge/s for RCEs in the short to medium term.

Moving forward, the UKI RCE network needs to promote *green* and *just* responses while addressing the interconnected, complex challenges of sustainability. In developing collaborations, the partner RCEs need to build on citizens awareness of the crisis, emphasizing positive actions and outcomes (exercise, local, experience of the natural world, community, food, time) in more sustainable ways of being and living. The RCE network further needs to ensure that opportunities for inclusive and participatory dialogue with diverse stakeholders, and media, are foregrounded, and should also actively seek out opportunities for shared learning through twinning of RCEs based across urban-rural, urban-urban, and rural-rural.

Moreover, the UKI RCE network needs to work on its communication strategy which should be bottom-up, not just top down. In terms of consultation, there is a real opportunity to capitalise on the online mode of communication currently being mainstreamed and other opportunities for communication between RCEs across UK, Ireland, Europe and the world, being mindful of Zoom fatigue! There is also evidence that simple messages worked within the pandemic, and RCEs need to consider how to emulate similar practices within communication strategies. Finally, in terms of RCE branding, there was acknowledgement that much initial communication to prospective partners was spent explaining its meaning, and much simpler messaging needed to be found to articulate the remit of the RCE – a suggestion in this regard was to use the analogy of RCEs as UNESCO heritage sites in ESD.

Focus Question B: *What collaborations should be prioritized across UKI RCEs in light of opportunities/ challenges in COVID-19 pandemic?*

There was an overall sense that an ‘RCE Sharing event’ should be organised to raise awareness of what each RCE is engaged in, and to stimulate ideas for future collaborations. It was emphasised that there was a real need for discussion and collaboration among grassroot members of RCEs, rather than just at steering committee levels. There was a sense that any collaboration should address the SDGs, with an eye to national policy alignment and youth and community engagement. Moreover, the need for whole systems consideration in project development was emphasized, with the aim of enhancing community resilience through grassroots initiatives highlighting practical ways for the wider public to engage in sustainability actions, working in tandem with policy change. There was also a suggestion that social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) should be foregrounded to make future communication about collaborations more digestible, with a move away from producing newsletters, while recognising that not everyone has access to online media.

In terms of ideas for collaboration, there was broad advice that the focus should be on projects of common interest, such as social prescribing (with community led, third sector partnerships including national wellness systems), circular economy (under threat from some poor COVID-19 practices) and capacity building vis-à-vis youth leadership. There was a suggestion that there could be Celtic RCEs collaboration across RCEs in Wales, Scotland and Ireland, that responds to the devolved contexts particularly across the UK based partner RCEs. There was also a suggestion that connections between arts and culture and sustainability could be explored, with learning garnered from linguistic experiences in areas in Wales. There was a suggestion for *RCE Day/s of Action* to highlight global challenges, such as Climate Change, and that these could be aligned with global events such as COP26. Finally, there was a suggestion that Climate Change toolkits for communities could be developed within a cross-RCE partnership.

Focus Question C: *How can the UKI RCEs Vision Statement be adapted to reflect our response to the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The participants were provided with a copy of a draft Vision Statement for the UKI RCEs and asked for commentary and suggestions for improving this statement.

Draft Vision Statement for UKI RCEs

The members of the Regional Centres of Expertise in the nations of the UK and Ireland acknowledge that, in this period of global pandemic, we will learn new ways to meet, listen, share and reach out to others in our commitment to contribute to a future where education for sustainable development underpins the changes needed to secure a viable and inclusive world.

We will: collaborate with colleagues within the global RCE network; share knowledge and expertise that will have an impact on policy makers and practitioners and provide a resource to practitioners and communities through conferences, seminars and promotion of best practice and research, working in partnership to develop urgent and sustained programmes and projects.

We are committed to working together to achieve this aim.

Comments and suggestions for re-framing of vision statement:

There was agreement that RCEs have a duty to share and co-create new knowledge, and this should be reflected within the vision statement. There was a sense that the current framing was top down, and would benefit from more active framing of its vision (and be more inviting to read) by including phrases such as ‘change agents’ ‘enable transformation’. The comments included that the Vision Statement should emphasise that RCEs work collaboratively with stakeholders and communities, and make explicit reference to collaboration and drawing ideas from membership and others.

Conclusion

There was agreement that a report would be circulated after the meeting, that further discussion was needed on re-framing on the Vision Statement, and on any network collaborations that might be prioritized.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to each the Chair and note taker for providing feedback from each of the break-out rooms. Thanks also to Betsy and colleagues from RCE Scotland (Learning for Sustainability Scotland) for their support in hosting and moderating the online forum. Thanks to Philip for engaging in the presentation and the extended discussions.

APPENDIX

Presentation by Dr. Philip Vaughter, UNU-IAS.

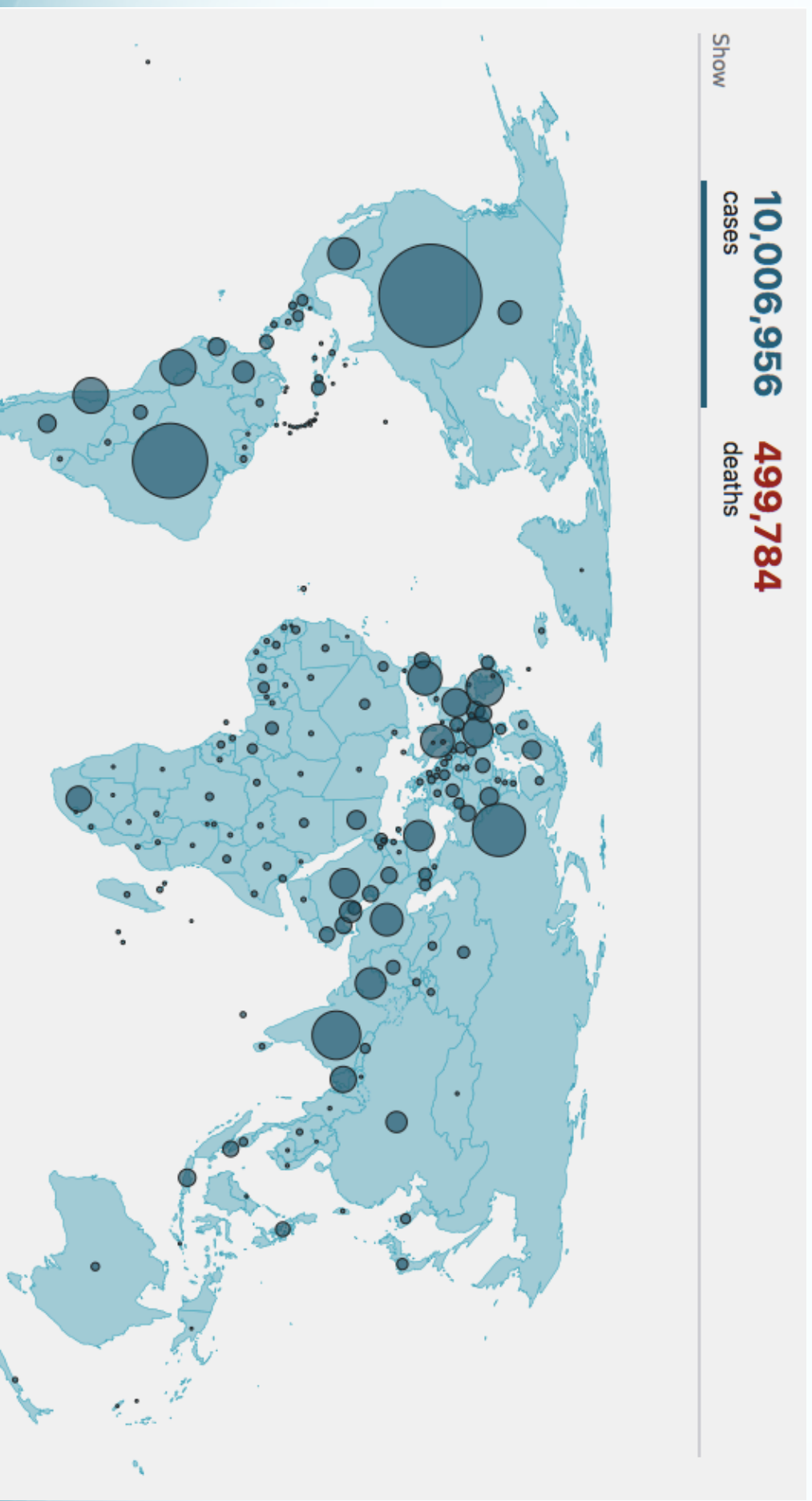
The role of RCES within and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic:

Lessons learned from the HIV pandemic

*Dr. Philip Vaughter, United Nations University – Institute for
the Advanced Study of Sustainability*

June 30th, 2020

Current cases of COVID-19



Repeating the past...

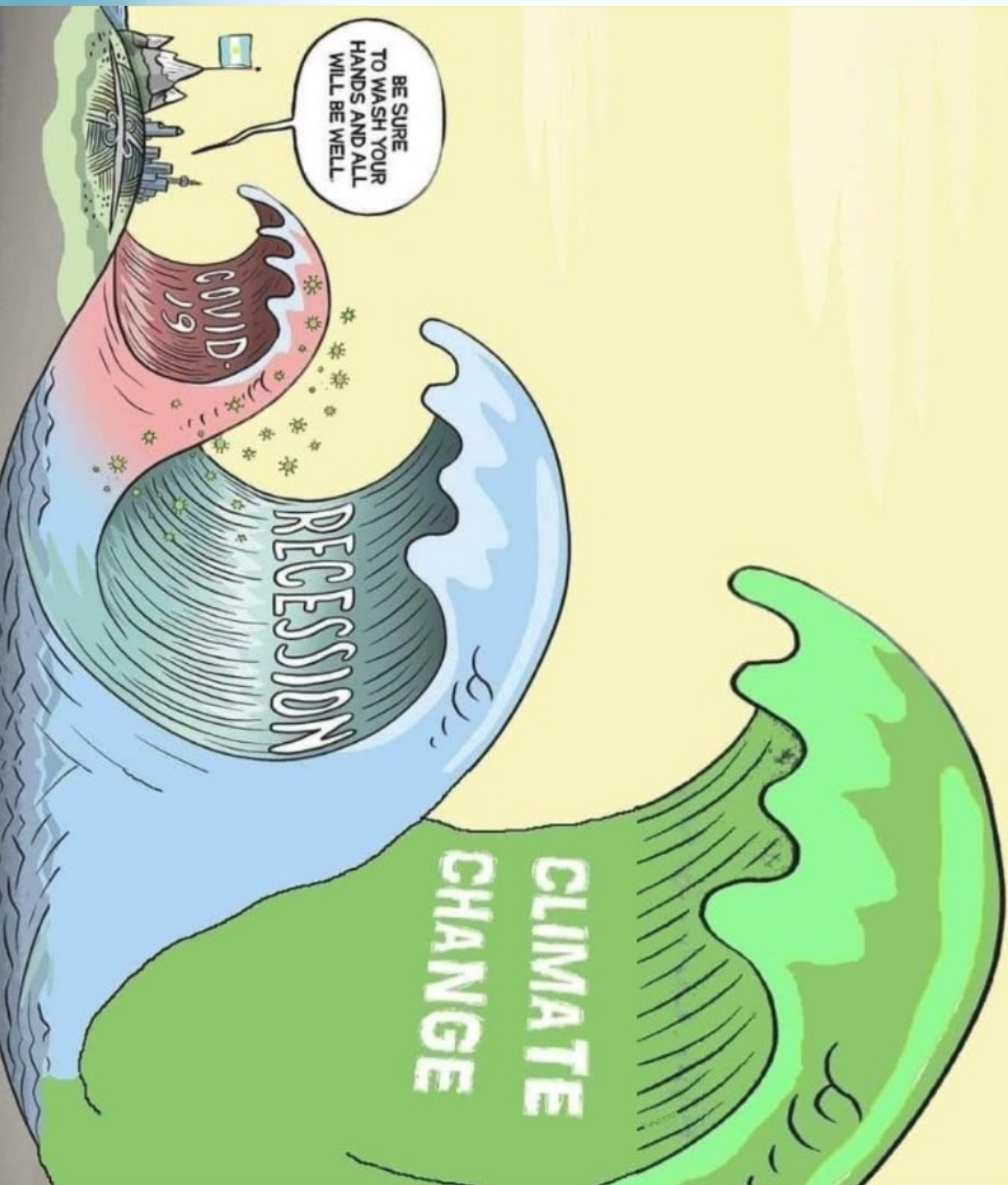
- Denial:
 - Most governments slow to respond – lived experiences of policy makers and public of SARS and MERS seemed to guide decisions more than listening to experts, much like how HIV was ignored for years by policy makers
- Panic:
 - When lock-downs and border closings came into effect, not well thought up – little thought of systematic implementation, public's ability to comply, and what comes next?
- Misinformation:
 - Outright lies started circulating on social media, but also through conventional news sources and print press about origins, transmissions, and treatment, as well as responses to pandemic – similar to 1980s and 1990s in regards to HIV/AIDS

Managing Risk: Lessons from HIV pandemic (Heagreaves & Davey, 2020)

- First, there is a need to anticipate health inequalities
 - Global burden of COVID-19 will likely fall hardest on older people and vulnerable groups in low and middle income developing countries
- Second, create enabling environment to support behavior change
 - Social conditions make it difficult for vulnerable groups to change behaviors. Encouragement to 'Abstain, Be Faithful, and Use Condoms' could not prevent HIV where gender inequalities and stigma around sex education were the norm.
- Lessons from the HIV pandemic show that supporting safer behaviors means addressing structures that constrain or enable people's choices.

Managing Risk: Lessons from HIV pandemic (Heagreaves & Davey, 2020)

- Third, a multidisciplinary effort is essential
 - Medical science can give us epidemiological models and can predict some dynamics of the epidemic, but a multidisciplinary effort is essential to design, characterize, and evaluate interventions to shape people's behavior.
- Telling the world's population to stay inside for years on end is not feasible, so what comes next?



Thank you!

- Hargreaves, J., Davey, C., Auerbach, J., Bond, V., Bonnell, C., ... & Doyle, A. (2020). Three lessons for the COVID-19 response from pandemic HIV. *The Lancet*, 7(5), e309-2311.