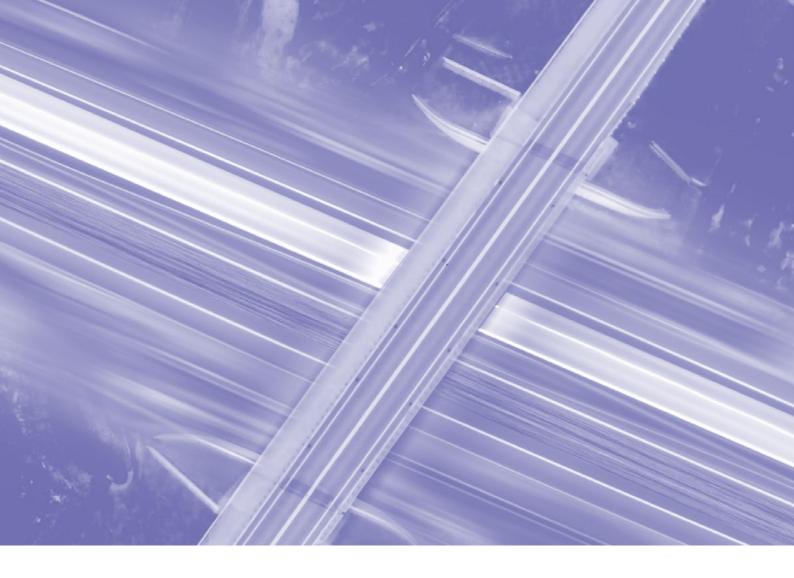Edelman

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP & DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Working Group 3 of the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies

Building trust between citizens and public institutions in emergency situations

CLUB DE MADRID

1. INTRODUCTION

Trust is a fundamental element of the relationship between political leaders, public institutions and citizens in democratic societies. Citizens' trust that their elected representatives will act in their best interests is at the heart of the principle of representation, and mechanisms of transparency and accountability exist to empower citizens to ascertain that political leaders and public institutions are indeed trustworthy – that there is some congruence between what citizens think is right, what the government promises to do, and what the government actually does.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a litmus test for political leadership around the world. Governments in all countries have had to impose unto their citizens harsh public health measures that have involved major trade-offs, such as between life and livelihood, without any guarantees that they would suffice to quell the virus. How they have managed the situation has been shaping the trust their citizens bestow upon them – and while the pandemic is far from over, it is already clear that some leaders have been more successful than others at being deemed trustworthy.

While building trust between citizens and public institutions is essential for democratic resilience in all circumstances, it takes on particular importance in emergency situations, where imminent risk and a rapidly changing situation create an imperative for quick decisions to guide mass action. This heightens the importance of effective leadership, even as the context makes it more challenging than ever to lead.

The aim of this paper is to learn the lessons offered by the COVID-19 pandemic about leadership and trust in emergency situations: how to preserve trust through effective leadership in emergency response, and how to build lasting foundations of democratic culture to help trust withstand the most trying circumstances.

2. TRUST BEFORE COVID-19

The crisis of trust long pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Observer Research Foundation, the decline of trust in government has been particularly visible since the global financial crisis of 2008, when, in the eye of the population, public authorities failed to protect the interests of the many. In September 2018, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres opened the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly highlighting a **global trust deficit disorder** affecting national and global institutions. He also singled out polarization, populism and the weakening of the multilateral system – factors loosely associated with democratic backsliding around the world – as emerging consequences of the crisis of trust.

In March 2019, at a roundtable in London, Club de Madrid and Edelman analysed the relationship between falling levels of trust in public institutions and the digital transformation of the information ecosystem. They found that the click-bait driven **information ecosystem** of social media and internet platforms had fuelled the crisis of trust by facilitating the broad circulation of disinformation, making it more difficult for individuals to distinguish fact from fiction and news from advertising, and trapping citizens into echo chambers that limit their exposure to diverse perspectives, push them into polarized corners and make them increasingly distrustful of information that does not match their worldview. As psychologists would put it, the online information ecosystem has galvanized confirmation bias, that is, the human tendency to seek out information that confirms what we already believe, and dismiss information that contradicts it.

Social media, however, cannot be blamed for all of the crisis of trust. The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer[1] , published at roughly the same time as the first reports of the new coronavirus disease were reaching the World Health Organization, also points out that distrust is driven by a growing sense of **inequity and unfairness** in the system, with 57 percent of the general population saying that government only serves the interests of the few. Inequalities within and between countries, dynamics of social exclusion, and corruption, coupled with widespread concerns about their own future – 83 percent of employed respondents reported fear of losing their jobs – would thus appear to be important factors in undermining trust. In societies where citizens grant their trust **based on competence (delivering on promises and expectations)** and **ethics (doing the right thing),** neither government nor the media were perceived as being either competent or ethical before the pandemic.

”**Our world is suffering from a bad case of 'Trust Deficit Disorder'. People are feeling troubled and insecure. Trust is at a breaking point. Trust in national institutions. Trust among states. Trust in the rules-based global order**”

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres,
Address to the General Assembly, 25 September 2018

1.The Edelman Trust Barometer has been tracking the evolution of trust for the last 20 years through direct population surveys around the world. The 2020 edition builds on an online survey of over 34,000 respondents from democratic and non-democratic countries from the Global North and the Global South, in October and November 2019.

3. COVID-19 AND TRUST

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic shook the dynamics of trust around the world. In the first months of 2020, it prompted citizens to **"rally around the flag"**, giving leaders whom they had previously been doubting a strong vote of confidence. According to the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update, trust in government increased 12 points to 63 percent in the first months of the pandemic. For the first time in 20 years, governments became the most trusted institution, above the media, NGOs and businesses. This is consistent with increases citizen's trust in government following other international calamities, most notably the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the global financial crisis of 2008. The late Ronald Inglehart, American political scientist and founding president of the World Values Survey, has long asserted that insecurity tilts citizens' preferences towards strong national leaders, who provide a unifying figure for protection in the face of adversity, and a sense of direction in the face of uncertainty.

The spike of citizens' trust in government at the onset of COVID-19, however, was short-lived. The 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer shows that citizens' **trust in government** lost in the second half of 2020 the ground it had gained in the first half. **Trust in all news sources** has also hit record lows. Nearly six in 10 people think that most news organizations are putting ideology or political position above informing the public; and more than half believe that journalists and reporters (59 percent) and government leaders (57 percent) are deliberately trying to mislead people by sharing information they know to be false. Government and the media, the usual sources of quality information in a crisis, have both failed to meet the test as COVID-19 has dragged on.

While none of the societal leaders that Edelman tracks - government leaders, CEOs, journalists and even religious leaders - are now trusted to do what is right, **trust in business** has resisted best in the later phase of the pandemic, fuelled by the private sector's success in producing vaccines and adopting flexible work practices. Citizens now find information shared by their employers to be more believable than governments or media reports, and there is growing appetite among citizens for CEOs to get more involved on broader societal issues and local community issues.

Just like COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on the health and livelihood of the most vulnerable groups in our societies, so has it prompted a record two-digit **class divide on trust**. According to the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer, trust in institutions is 17 percentage points higher among the informed public – the elite group comprised of college-educated individuals aged 25-64 who are among the top 25% of income earners in their country and report significant engagement in public policy and business news – than among mass population. There are also wide differences among citizens in terms information hygiene, understood as the habit of engaging with the news, avoiding echo chambers, verifying information, and not amplifying unvetted information. Only 26% of the general population report good information hygiene, while 39% report poor information hygiene.

In addition to putting growing pressure on democratic systems, the rising tide of mistrust is also **threatening COVID-19 recovery** by undermining people's confidence in and willingness to comply with public health measures, including mask wearing and vaccination. Edelman's data shows that people with poor information hygiene are 11 percentage points less likely than people with good information hygiene to be willing to get the vaccine within the first year of its availability.

Overall, academic studies report that higher trust is associated with lower mortality from COVID-19; that the link between the two is greater compliance with measures; and that this is consistent with evidence from previous epidemics.

This underscores the fundamental importance of trust between citizens and public institutions during emergency situations. In his report to the General Assembly on Our Common Agenda, UN Secretary-General Guterres sums it up: "Countries with higher levels of trust in public institutions (along with higher levels of interpersonal trust) did better at managing the pandemic. The types of challenges that we will face in the future will require similar, if not greater, levels of trust in each other and in our institutions." This raises the crucial question of what governments and leaders can do now and in years ahead to rekindle the trust of citizens, so that they can count on a stronger trust capital when the next crisis comes around.

TRUST VS. TRUSTWORTHINESS

There is broad consensus around the importance of trust in democratic societies. If citizens do not trust their elected leaders, they are more likely to disengage from political affairs, throw their support to populist or authoritarian leaders, or engage in civil disobedience of various kinds. But what happens when citizens give their trust to untrustworthy leaders – leaders who fail to deliver on their commitments, to meet the obligations of public office, and to act in the public interest?

The COVID-19 pandemic has produced numerous examples of political leaders who failed to acknowledge the pandemic threat and/or to provide an adequate policy response. Brazilian President Bolsonaro derided COVID-19 as a minor flu and obstructed legislation aimed at implementing preventive measures. In the US, former President Trump actively propagated misinformation about mask wearing and treatment. And Prime Minister Modi of India ignored epidemiological data when authorizing large public gatherings, leading to dramatic rates of infection and mortality as the Delta variant started to spread. Some of these leaders have already faced accountability at the polls – but regardless of their continuance or removal from office, they continue to command the trust of large numbers of citizens.

The GovTrust Project's Trust but Verify study points to the importance of an open media environment and citizens' strong cognitive skills, acquired through education, to drive the right kind of trust – the kind that is only bestowed on benevolent and competent leaders.

4. THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP IN EMERGENCIES

Just as one does not build a ship in the middle of a storm, it is hard to build trust while governing effectively in the challenging policy environment of an emergency situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a spotlight on the multiple challenges facing political leaders in a crisis environment, where the attributes of trustworthy leadership vary from what they are in normal circumstances.

Decision-making in the face of uncertainty

Emergency situations are characterized by risk and uncertainty. Decisions with far-reaching implications must be made on the basis of **imperfect and incomplete information**, as evidence and data evolves rapidly. Patchy reports, sometimes originating from unverified sources or political foes, must be assessed quickly and, if misjudged, can orient policy-makers in the wrong direction. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, signals of an impending emergency were largely ignored in large parts of the world, as Western leaders chose to treat the epidemic as an Asian problem. The evolution of epidemiological and clinical data also led to policy reversal on key elements of the COVID-19 response across the globe, including mask-wearing and the use of hydroxychloroquine – a malaria pill – to prevent severe complications in COVID-19 patients.

The imperative to respond quickly to an emergency situation also makes it difficult for executive leaders to **consult other political actors** – including parliament, opposition parties and civil society – in the decision-making process. As COVID-19 erupted, a total of 109 countries adopted emergency declarations that gave Executive leaders extraordinary powers to adopt and implement emergency responses, often curtailing the role of other democratic institutions and actors. Parliaments around the world were quick to innovate to provide legislative oversight for government action – for example, through the adoption of new laws and procedural rules to allow virtual sitting (eg. in Brazil and Spain), the creation of special committees to sit on

behalf of parliament (eg. in New Zealand) or the use of online platforms to conduct hearings (eg. in Chile and Ireland). But mechanisms for citizen and civil society engagement – such as Townhall meetings, open committee sessions, public consultations, multisectoral councils, or even access to information mechanisms – were mostly halted. Government leaders were left to make decisions with much **less input** than they would receive in non-emergency circumstances.

This particular context for decision-making makes trust a fundamental ingredient for policy success. Citizens must trust that governments are managing the situation with their best interests in mind, even in the absence of complete and consistent data, and even if crucial decisions are made with very few people in the room.

Crisis communications

In situations where, as a result of incomplete information or difficult trade-offs, there is no obvious policy solution, a strong communications strategy makes the difference between a good government response and a bad one. How government decisions are communicated is always important – but in emergency situations, the importance of good communication is compounded by the prevailing feeling of insecurity and anxiety among the population. The impact of good communication on citizens' behaviour during a crisis is well documented (for example, by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency), as are good practices to effectively influence citizen behaviours through communication.

Long before COVID-19 erupted, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism had underscored the importance for public leaders to **communicate quickly** in situations of crisis, to fill the information space with facts, however incomplete, before less reliable sources of information take first mover's advantage. In its companion report How an outbreak became an epidemic, the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response observes that, in the case of COVID-19, "a global infodemic of information, misinformation and disinformation spread almost as fast as the virus".

Communicating the facts clearly and quickly is paramount – but studies on public communication about COVID-19 (such as the OECD's) have also found **transparency and empathy** to be crucial

in determining the effectiveness of pandemic-related communications. Leaders who have been communicating frequently, using varied and creative technological tools to engage with different groups

"There is not just one 'scientific' approach to dealing with COVID-19. Different countries are responding in different ways. Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Germany and New Zealand each provide different examples of how to limit the initial spread of the virus, with different policy mixes. Hong Kong, for example, never had a rigid lockdown. New Zealand ordered social distancing early and hard. These different approaches were informed by scientific findings, but they resulted from political decisions, not science"

Alex Stevens, Governments cannot just 'follow the science' on COVID-19 Nature Human Behaviour, 4, 560 (2020)

of citizens in proximity settings, and who have acknowledged and directly addressed citizens' concerns, have been found more successful at securing their trust and rallying their enduring support for, and conformity with the measures taken.

Leaders who, on the contrary, have relied primarily on a traditional approach to communication, based on formal addresses and message control, have tended to find themselves running behind the tide of disinformation. The lack of empathy and the inability to make communication a two-way street by **listening** to citizens' concerns is also thought to compound resistance to public health recommendations, including vaccine hesitancy, especially in polarized contexts and in minority communities whose concerns are rooted in historic precedent.

Communication mishaps can severely damage trust. A common communication mistake during the COVID-19 pandemic has been the lack of **coordination in messaging** among public administrations – whether different government agencies or different administrative levels. In some cases, this originated in a lack of **policy coordination** – a situation particularly likely in federal systems with shared competencies and weak pre-existing structures for dialogue between federal authorities and federated entities. In other cases, however, it was a failure to coordinate how an agreed policy would be presented to the public. In the US, the Trump administration was reported to have contradicted itself at least 20 times in the first six weeks of the pandemic. In a survey conducted by the OECD, less than half of respondents from subnational governments in the EU believed that COVID-19 vertical coordination mechanisms with their national government had been effective. Governments that have set up effective policy coordination structures for COVID-19 response – like Australia's National Cabinet or Korea's Central Crisis Management Committee – have also done better at speaking with one voice.

The role of advisors

Soon after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, government leaders in dozens of countries resorted to science as a testament for the trustworthiness of their policy response. Some referred to **scientific evidence** as the basis for their decisions. Many others, from Justin Trudeau in Canada to Robert Abela in Malta and Pedro Sanchez in Spain, also invited **scientific advisors** to join them periodically – often daily -- in the media spotlight. Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Theresa Tam, Malta's Superintendent of Public Health Charmaine Gauci, and Spain's Chief Coordinator for Health Alerts and Emergencies Fernando Simon, have all become household names in their respective countries. According to the data collected by Edelman, this was a well-chosen strategic communication practice, as technical and academic experts are consistently among the spokespeople deemed most credible by citizens.

Political analysts, however, have warned of the dangers of having too much science in crisis communications. Making a scientist or senior public servant the daily face of televised COVID-19 briefings has cast a confusing image as to the **locus of decision-making**. Citizens may forget that policy responses, even when they are guided by scientific evidence, remain the purview and responsibility of political leaders - and they remain political decisions. When two different groups of scientific experts publicly advised the UK government on a virus contention strategy, one calling for population-wide measures while the other suggested that only at-risk individuals should be isolated, it was obvious that the selected approach would be a political choice, the accountability for which would rest with the government making it. In countless other situations, however, the frontier between scientific advice and policy decision has been blurry at best, in the public's perception.

Civic space

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the old adage "ask for a man's money and you will get his opinion, ask for his opinion and you will get his money" also applies to trust. According to the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, since the onset of COVID-19, 152 countries have adopted measures that limit freedom of assembly. Lockdowns, bans on public gatherings and social distancing requirements have severely **curtailed civic space**, limiting the menu of options available to citizens who wish to express their opinion on public policy issues and propose alternatives. Limits to freedom of speech, adopted under the pretext of preventing COVID-related disinformation, posed an additional barrier; over 20 countries passed such laws in 2020. By the end that year, the CIVICUS Monitor reported that 87% of the world's population were living in countries with serious civic space restrictions (related or not to COVID-19 response).

While pockets of discontent with public health measures existed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the extension of restrictions to freedom of movement and assembly over a long period of time, coupled with rising economic needs, also fuelled growing discontent and protest. A report by the World Protests Platform affirms that the pandemic has accentuated social unrest. According to CIVICUS, roughly 34% of the protests documented between February 2020 and January 2021 were related to COVID-19. The OECD's Recommendation on Open Government of 2017 has long advised that open government – understood as a form of governance that promotes transparency, accountability and stakeholder participation – is critical to building citizen trust. In the particular context of COVID-19, "civil society is instrumental in building and maintaining trust in the health system", affirmed the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Not all forms of civic expression were annihilated by pandemic-related restrictions, however. Around the world, there are examples of **mass protest movements** that successfully continued to mobilize public attention and effect political change under COVID-19 conditions: the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, the student-led protests leading to constitutional reform in Chile, the popular call for an election re-run in Malawi.

Digital technologies also opened up new **online spaces for civic engagement**, from virtual town hall meetings to the web-based crowdsourcing of policy solutions for pandemic-related problems, in initiatives such as #WirVsVirus. Participatory mechanisms, such as citizen assemblies conducted through online platforms, were also explored as an option to bring citizen voices into policy reflexions on pandemic response, in civic-led initiatives like the Lockdown Debate that explored attitudes to contact tracing technology in the UK, or a UN Democracy Fund project in the Balkans that used the citizen assembly model to address high rates of vaccine hesitancy. While they remain experimental and embyonic in size and scope, these efforts have shown the value of participatory and deliberative mechanisms to build common ground when public trust is under strain in emergencies.

Delivery

Finally, emergency situations pose enormous challenges for political leaders who are accountable for the delivery of public services and assistance. Some types of emergencies, like natural disasters, damage the physical infrastructure for public service delivery. Others, like pandemics, bring about severe disruptions to the administrative channels and human resources available for public service delivery. And most result in a rapid spike in demand for certain types of public services and assistance, with localized pockets of vulnerability, exceeding the state's capacity to respond.

Yet inclusive **public service delivery** has been found to be a key element of government's perceived competence, and a key driver of trust in various studies, from Finland to New Zealand. Rebuilding and upholding citizens' trust in government in a crisis situation requires governments to ensure that essential emergency response services – healthcare in a pandemic, social protection in an economic crisis, temporary shelter in a natural disaster – are delivered effectively and equitably to all citizens.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

"Building trust and countering mistrust, between people and institutions, but also between different people and groups within societies, is our defining challenge", affirms the UN Secretary-General in Our Common Agenda. In times of turbulence and uncertainty, trust holds society together and allows people and prosperity to rebound, building on a common understanding of the social contract.

Rebuilding trust after COVID-19 and maintaining it through crises to come will require every institution to play its part. The information bankruptcy – the lack

of agreement on a common truth within society – that has undermined resilience to COVID-19 in countries around the world can only be tackled with joint efforts from governments, businesses, the media, civil society, and citizens themselves. There are, however, a series of actions that only political leaders can take, now and when the next crisis hits, to protect and rebuild trust.

1

Be prepared

Despite the existence of multiple recommendations on emergency preparedness, such as the OECD's 2014 Recommendation on the Governance of Critical Risks, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that most countries were not prepared to handle an emergency of that magnitude. It is incumbent upon political leaders to **elevate emergency preparedness on the political agenda, as well as in civic awareness**. National structures for emergency preparedness, whether polyvalent or risk-specific, and the reports they periodically produce, must command more attention from political leaders and citizens alike.

Executive leaders should ensure that their government has a coherent **strategy** for emergency risk management – one that assigns clear leadership for preparedness to various types of critical risks, defines decision-making structures in emergency response, considers the views of multiple stakeholders (including representatives of specific demographic groups, such as women and youth), and plans for appropriate administrative and financial arrangements for the continuity of essential services in the event of an emergency. Cross-party consensus on preparedness is also fundamental to ensure the strategy is taken forward through electoral cycles.

To make sure future emergency preparedness strategies build on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, governments should consider using **post hoc oversight and policy learning** mechanisms. Post hoc commissions on emergency response, whether independent or embedded in parliament, have shown on numerous occasions their value to improve preparedness (eg. Canada's National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health of 2003, or the US' National Commission on Terrorist Attacks of 2002). International platforms for cooperation on emergency

preparedness could also help countries learn from each other's experience and evolve towards common practices, building on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Preparedness plans should also review the respective roles of national vs. local governments in emergency response. While national authorities must play a necessary role of coordination in national or transnational emergency situations, **empowering local governments** with the necessary competences and resources to make and implement decisions on emergency response is also necessary. In emergency situations where the level of risk varies within the geography of a country, local administrations are an essential partner for evidence gathering, policy making and service delivery. This requires strong and healthy pre-existing intra-governmental coordination and communication structures.

2

Lead with facts and decisiveness

A key learning from the COVID-19 pandemic is the imperative for **quick action** at the onset of an emergency situation. Questions that have arisen regarding democracy's ability to face critical situations as effectively as autocracies take their origin in the usually lengthy processes of consultation and deliberation surrounding decision-making in democratic systems. In order to respond quickly, democratic leaders must be attentive to warning signs of an impending emergency and stand ready to gather facts and advice quickly, so that their policy responses can be agile and based on the best **evidence** available. Setting up a close **advisory structure** – or activating it, if it already exists – is essential to get a good view of thematic and institutional matters surrounding the impending crisis.

An early priority for executive leaders in emergency response must be to define a clear **hierarchy of policy objectives**. Drawing up timelines for policy response, assessing costs, identifying financing mechanisms, and verifying the legality of various policy options, are all elements of decision-making that must be considered very early on. In federal systems, where

national leaders face the additional challenge of leading policy coordination across government levels, the early set-up or activation of **policy coordination structures** is also fundamental.

In order to **avoid political bickering** over emergency response, and ensure broad support for the measures to be taken, executive leaders must also make a point to **consult parliament**, opposition parties and social actors early on, and regularly as the situation progresses. While this is important in all democracies, it is most crucial in countries with a bi-partisan or otherwise heavily polarized political environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that parliaments, in particular, have been able to respond quickly with flexible arrangements to provide multi-party input and oversight over executive action.

3

Communicate with truth and empathy

When a crisis erupts, political leaders must be quick to **fill the news space with facts**, reporting what is known, however little that may be, before rumours and disinformation gain the high ground. They must have the courage to **talk straight**, and regularly share honest information with citizens. They must not be afraid to explain complex situations, and be transparent about the information and advice underpinning their decisions. Clearly stating the **specific policy objectives** towards which their decisions tend will also help citizens understand the measures taken. But leaders must also be transparent about what they don't know, and prepare the public for the possibility that they may **change course** if new evidence points to a new policy direction.

In communicating their policy decisions on crisis response, leaders must **empathize** with and address people's fears. Proximity communication – engaging with citizens with evidence-based, yet clear and simple messages, through the same platforms they use to communicate with their community – can provide a fertile context for empathy. To increase the chances that the information they provide will be understood and perceived as trustworthy, political leaders must also build **alliances with trusted third-parties**

– scientific advisors, like those who came into the spotlight during COVID-19, but also community leaders and business leaders. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, with business leaders standing as the most trusted source of information in Edelman's latest Trust Barometer, working with them to amplify public messages could have been an effective means to raise trust in the information shared.

Finally, leaders must also ensure that public institutions **speak with one voice**, transmitting clear and consistent messages. This - communicating both quickly and in a coordinated fashion when a crisis erupts – requires public institutions to be prepared with well-oiled structures for both policy and message coordination. Coordinating communications with advisory bodies, including those who may dissent with the policy decisions being taken, is also important to make sure that the data, trade-offs and arguments underpinning policy decisions are well explained to citizens.

4

Pre-empt online detractors

Restoring information integrity in the new digital environment is a titanic task. Many more emergencies are likely to happen before the challenges of the platform-driven information ecosystem are resolved. There are, however, a number of actions that political leaders can take to limit the damage of information bankruptcy in the face of future emergencies.

One such action is to **encourage credible actors**, beyond their own spokespersons, to fill the news space throughout the emergency. Edelman's data has shown that the perceived credibility of international organizations like the World Health Organization has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Giving more prominence to the briefings offered by these organizations in the national news space – eg. on national television during prime time – can help facts prevail over disinformation. Supporting **responsible journalism**, including by giving reporters access to information, protection and resources to report on the emergency, is also important to make sure that high-quality information and analysis reaches the public.

Citizens also have an active role to play in improving their information hygiene, and Edelman data shows evidence of a growing desire for self-improvement on that score. Government leaders, however, must help them on. During a crisis, this translates into the imperative to create, or support independent third-parties to create tools to **debunk mis- and disinformation** about the crisis. They must also appeal to the corporate social responsibility of social media platforms to develop solutions, within the boundaries of freedom of expression, to stop or slow down the "viralisation" of content that has been found to be false.

Public investment in **information awareness and digital literacy training**, through direct government action or civil society partnerships, can also help foster more responsible information behaviour on the part of citizens. While these are often conceived as long-term objectives, the experience of successful digital literacy projects targeting opinion-shapers during COVID-19, such as IREX's, has shown that they also bring results in the heat of a crisis.

5

Open up civic space

Trust between citizens and institutions is best maintained if there is a two-way dialogue. In order to uphold citizens' trust, governments must be prepared to listen to citizens' ideas and trust their ability to contribute to problem-solving. In a crisis situation, this requires first and foremost that **restrictions on civic space** be limited to those strictly necessary – both in stringency and in duration – to address the risks at hand. It also requires governments to share information with citizens, openly, in disaggregated form, and through accessible channels; and that they work in consultation with civil society to plan the phasing down of the restrictions once the emergency subsides.

Giving a voice to civil society in emergency preparedness and emergency response is also recommendable to secure and maintain trust. While the imperative to respond quickly to an emerging crisis may require executive leaders to make early decisions behind closed doors, governments should create opportunities for social actors such as civil society organizations, business leaders, trade unions and other opinion-shapers to **participate in policy processes** at the earliest feasible opportunity, through briefings, hearings or participation in consultative structures. Digital technologies may afford opportunities for informal, light-touch interactions with civil society throughout emergency response, as Finland showed through the real-time posting of emergency decrees on a legal blog to invite public scrutiny.

Direct **deliberation mechanisms** involving selected groups of citizens, like citizen assemblies, have also proven helpful in providing input into some mid- and long-term challenges posed by COVID-19, based on consensus that emerges from the bottom up. In the UK, for instance, the three-week #LockDownDebate initiative brought a group of 28 citizens to formulate recommendations on the requirements that would make a government contact tracing app trusted and justified for transitioning out of lockdown. While this type of deliberative structures can hardly be activated in the very early phase of emergency response, when quick and decisive executive action is needed, they can add value at later stages of emergency response and in emergency preparedness processes. They will however work best if they are designed, tried and institutionalized before a crisis hits. They must also include particular allowances to ensure the equitable participation of all segments of civil society, including women, young people and minority groups.

6

Build partnerships

Meeting the challenge of effective and inclusive public service delivery during an emergency requires governments at all levels to address business continuity as part of their emergency preparedness plans (see above). It also requires the state to have the capacity to respond to rapid surges in the demand for certain public services and/or to rapidly channel state resources to the most affected areas – an effort that requires close coordination with **local authorities**.

To that effect, political leaders must invest in building strong, long-term partnerships with other stakeholders. Business alliances and **public-private partnerships** are particularly suited to provide surge capacity for service delivery, and to foster rapid innovation for the development of new solutions to emergency-related

problems. Businesses' capacity to rapidly develop solutions to COVID-19 challenges – from protective equipment to contact-tracing apps and vaccines – leaves us in no doubt of their essential role in crisis situations. Examples such as Mauritius, where two business associations closely coordinated with the government a series of actions in support of social protection and lockdown logistics, show the potential for corporate social responsibility to add value to emergency response. Governments must, however, place **transparency and due diligence** at the heart of their business relations, from procurement processes to data transfer.

The experience of COVID-19 has shown that **civil society organizations** are another critical partner in implementing crisis responses and delivering essential services. Community leaders – religious groups, grassroots groups, local radios or other locally influential figures – can also play an important role in the communication of policy responses, helping ensure that government messages speak to the people, in their cultural context. Drawing on civil society, based on healthy long-term partnerships, can help governments find an alternative to military intervention when the civil structure of the state needs extra support for the delivery of emergency services.

such as emergency drills, are also useful to keep citizens informed about potential risks and help them assimilate their role in emergency response. A growing body of evidence from countries as diverse as Indonesia, Brazil and the US also shows that digital technologies have the potential to contribute to these efforts through gamification – the modelling of emergency situations in video games, to inform and educate the public about the choices and behaviours that lead to the best results.

While national governments have the responsibility to coordinate efforts towards civic education, the engagement of **local administrations and community actors** is essential to bring these initiatives to citizens, in their proximity settings. The formal education system should also be used to increase awareness on emergency preparedness and response from the early years.

7

Foster responsible citizenship

Finally, governments also have a responsibility to help citizens engage as responsible agents of emergency response. In the heat of an emergency, this is best achieved through effective communication on how citizens should respond – with timely, specific, feasible and well-justified **recommendations on appropriate behaviours**. As the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency puts it, governments must make it easy for citizens to do the right thing.

Countries that have a long track record of citizen-focused emergency preparedness efforts, such as Sweden and Japan, also emphasize the importance of **community engagement in emergency preparedness**. Periodic public communications on critical risks and public awareness activities

Edelman

Edelman is a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. For twenty years, through the Edelman Trust Barometer, Edelman has studied trust in four institutions (media, business, NGOs and government) around the world.

CLUB DE MADRID

Club de Madrid is the world's largest forum of democratic former Presidents and Prime Ministers, who leverage their individual and collective leadership experience and global reach to strengthen inclusive democratic practice and improve the well-being of people around the world. For further information, visit **www.clubmadrid.org**