

# LETTER OF VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE

meaningful expressions and understandings from different cultures on  
how to deal with the crisis



## **The Corona crisis: approached from Disaster Studies and Biocentric Good Living**

The Corona pandemic is a disaster. Doctors and caregivers are working hard to alleviate the consequences, but disaster studies and ways of life such as Buen Vivir (biocentric good living) offer clues to alleviate the consequences of the crisis and how to deal with these and future crises. There are four ways to approach disasters: by eliminating the danger, by limiting the risk, by reducing the vulnerability or by increasing resilience.

Eliminating the danger is done by stopping international traffic and prohibiting physical contact; limiting the risk is done by self-isolation and lock-down measures; and reducing vulnerability happens to shield the elderly. These are all short-term measures.

Until there is not a vaccine or an effective medicine increasing resilience is the only way to be cured from the Corona Disease and to build immunity. We think that we should also focus on increasing resilience at other levels. Families, groups of friends, working environments, neighborhoods, villages, cities, countries, continents and the world can all increase their resilience. Now it is more than ever apparent how important good family situations, friendships, neighborly assistance, national policies, and European and global cooperation are.

To build resilience, it is also crucial that we review our relationship with Nature. We are not above Nature, we are part of it. Not only can we keep Nature out of our bodies with medicines, but we also have to try to be healthy in our Natural environment where viruses also occur. One of the clearest examples of our disturbed relationship with Nature is factory farming, in general our "unnatural" contact with animals appears to be the main cause of the emergence and spread of virus epidemics. This includes the Corona epidemic, which probably started on the wild animal market in Wuhan (Volkskrant, January 29). There are countless examples of our disturbed relationship with Nature that make our society less resilient.

Unrestrained globalization is another cause of the pandemic. In the Volkskrant of April 2, Sheila Sitalsing gave an example of one the elimination of our privatization virus. In 2012, we sold our state vaccine factory to an Indian company. In the Groene Amsterdammer (1 April), professor of financial geography Ewald van Engelen explained that without our global production chains that are mainly based on profit and breaking buffers, the Corona epidemic would never have become a pandemic. Unfortunately, we don't learn from previous lessons: since the financial crisis (2008), debt has skyrocketed and most economies have become even more vulnerable to shocks.

In contrast to China and some other countries, Dutch policy tends for the time being not to have the illusion that we can keep the virus at bay, but that increasing our resilience is crucial. Within this logic, Prime Minister Rutten mentioned the word adult many times in the press conference on Tuesday 31 March: we must act as an adult country with adult citizens, we must do it together.

During this crisis and in its aftermath, we can use a deeper view on the meaning of being adult (full-grown) to build a resilient, healthy society in conjunction with nature.

Adult means that we are fully grown. After centuries of technological and economic growth, we now have enough and we don't need to grow any further. In his book *Butterfly Economy*, Jack Cox, for example, argues for hardly any economic growth, limiting debt, and an ecological (basic) income. Just like an eighteen-year-old, the Netherlands is fully grown in 2020, but we must continue to learn to deal well with all the changing future situations in our lives. We have found that we owe much of our well-being to the economic and technological growth of the past centuries, but that the growth spurs have also caused our world to be no longer resilient and sensitive to climate change, financial crises, pandemics and other disasters.

We can learn from how we coped with floods in the Netherlands, which have caused many disasters in the past centuries. After the flood of 1953 and the implementation of the Delta Plan, people first wanted to continue raising dikes, so that we would have a minimal risk of flooding in the coming centuries. However, it turned out that this would be prohibitively expensive and physically impracticable, and so the "Living with Water" policy was born. Many measures are being taken, including raising a number of dikes, with the acceptance of future floods, the consequences of which will not be disastrous due to the measures taken.

We can avert future disasters if we are fully committed to resilience in the coming years: for ourselves, our families, our friends, our neighborhood, our country, our continents, our planet, as a reciprocal part of nature. The Harmony with the Earth principle is leading here. By doing this, we can ensure that epidemics do not become pandemics, the consequences of economic crises remain limited, natural resources remain available, floods do not cause many deaths and climate change is contained.

Henk Jan Laats, PhD in Disaster Studies and Innovation Studies, Wageningen University, Director of Cross Cultural Bridges

Dorine van Norren, obtained her PhD in, among others, Buen Vivir (biocentric good life), Tilburg University and University of Amsterdam.

Both are experts for the UN organization Harmony with Nature [www.harmonywithnatureun.org](http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org)

4-4-2020