

## **Bouncing Back to do Good and Green: Three pathways for Social and Sustainable Entrepreneurs to be resilient during a crisis**

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Resilience stems from the Latin words *resilire* or *resilio*, which mean “bounce” or “jump back” and is defined as a positive adaptation to adverse events. However, positive adaptation can mean different things to different people. While for regular entrepreneurs, positive adaptation might just mean the survival of their company, for social entrepreneurs this might not be enough. We followed 15 social and sustainable entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic and discovered that they felt resilient when they were able to adapt in a way that they were still able to pursue their social and/or environmental mission. In this article we’ll share three pathways for this kind of positive adaptation:

### **1. Find an alternative route**

Social and sustainable entrepreneurs pursue their missions by investing their profits in social and/or environmental goals. One of the major setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic is that entrepreneurs weren’t able to generate cash flow through their regular activities anymore. Customer groups suddenly disappeared or they couldn’t provide certain services anymore due to corona measures. This created an urgency to find alternative routes to keep the cash flow in order with the resources at hand.

For example, two of the entrepreneurs were running a sustainable cafe when their area went into lockdown. Together with their team, they looked for creative solutions to generate cash flow: they organized a Christmas market, opened a supermarket with sustainable products and started catering vegan meals for hotels.

Making do with the resources at hand can also fit well with a sustainable mission. As one of the entrepreneurs, who has a circular hub expressed: *“That is a very circular thought: looking at what is at hand. If you build circularly then you look at the materials that are already there and then you say “well I have so much glass, I have so much steel, I have so much wood. What can I make of this?”*” In short, creating an alternative route with the scarce resources at hand can be a positive way to adapt to a crisis.

## **2. Find an alternative perspective**

Still, finding an alternative route is easier said than done. Sometimes, the faced adversity was so severe that entrepreneurs also had to create an alternative perspective on what they wanted to achieve. As expressed by one of the entrepreneurs: *“I was about to make the jump to become a scale-up and people told me that it had to go faster and had to become bigger. The crisis made me realize: now I have less turnover, but I also have lower costs. ... So, it gave me the time-out that I needed to get out of the rat race I was in.”*

The crisis forces entrepreneurs to reflect on their purpose and what kind of entrepreneur they want to be: *“That I came back to why I am actually doing it: yes, what suits me most as an entrepreneur is actually organic growth.”* She realized that in order to grow, she also had to sacrifice certain principles, but with organic growth she doesn't have to. In other words, taking the time to reflect can help you find an alternative perspective to give your own meaning to being resilient.

## **3. Find an alternative vehicle**

Another option is to find other vehicles than your existing venture to pursue your mission. For example, one of the entrepreneurs who has a venture that sells sustainable and fair tea says that: *“in the broadest sense of the word, my mission is always related to sustainability, but off course there are many ways to put that into action.”* During the crisis, she decided to also make a podcast about the protein transition.

Another entrepreneur, who has a fair and sustainable fashion store, similarly realized that there was more to focus on than just the survival of her company to positively adapt to the crisis. During the crisis, she started an initiative to deliver food packages to the community living close to the factory of the company in Nepal, who were suffering from the economic consequences of the corona crisis.

*“We tried to get something positive out of that and we try to hold on to these small things, because you think you have to make sure that your business survives, but when you hear these kinds of stories, you think hey guys...”* In other words, you can choose a path in which you do not prioritize the resilience of your venture, but instead prioritize your own resilience to pursue your mission.

When enacting resilience as a social or sustainable entrepreneur, think about the question: what does positive adaptation actually mean for you, your venture and the

larger system? Be creative in finding alternative routes, perspectives and vehicles to positively adapt to the crisis and you can bounce back better whatever may come your way.

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