

High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

High-Level Debate on Ensuring that No One is Left Behind: Reaching the most vulnerable

Statement delivered by

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Chairman, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

The World Humanitarian Summit in May this year firmly set humanitarian need in the context of broader efforts on sustainable development in its three dimensions. In that sense, accomplishing the 2030 Agenda is a crisis prevention mechanism. And it calls for action especially for the most vulnerable, for those that are most affected by unfair economic and social structures and a deteriorating environment.

The poorest of this world, low-income households, indigenous people and people living in fragile contexts, are the first ones facing the harsh reality of planetary boundaries. This can be in form of declining fish stocks or extreme weather events which destroy crops and livelihoods.

And those who are weaker to begin with, such as children, elderly persons and people with disabilities, are also the most vulnerable to pollution and environment-linked diseases. However, these impacts will affect us all sooner or later.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In three weeks from now, we will have used as much from nature as our earth can renew in the whole year. Some of us have dramatically overspent their share.

Let me be clear: This is happening based on infrastructure and lifestyles, consumption and production patterns that emanate from business-as-usual. Examples are megacities lacking efficient and secure public transport, carbon intensive energy systems or supply chains based on indecent social and environmental working conditions.

You asked me to be frank: Just as people should not be deprived of balanced nutrition, we should strive to reduce massive overconsumption of meat that is aggravating climate change. Lifestyle education of the richest is intrinsically linked to ensuring access to quality education for the poorest.

Obviously, changing lifestyles and economies needs enabling policy and regulatory frameworks. Germany seeks to tackle these issues, nationally and as a partner in international cooperation. Our recently adopted National Program for Sustainable Consumption is one example.

Let me mention three systemic approaches:

First: We must protect the ones most exposed to risk.

Exposure to risk is hugely unequal. The most exposed cannot wait until our societies and economies become sustainable and resilient. Social protection systems including social protection floors are fundamental to ensure their immediate protection. Germany strongly supports the corresponding ILO recommendations.

Furthermore, insurance models can be an important tool. They can insure farmers against weather-related crop failure or protect small businesses from fall-outs due to destroyed infrastructure.

Insurance models can bring about a shift from soliciting help to claiming a right, and thus to preserve the dignity of human beings - everywhere.

To give one example for concrete action: With the G7 Initiative InsuResilience, we are aiming to insure an additional 400 million vulnerable people against climate risks.

Another relevant G7 Initiative is the new ILO Vision Zero Fund that shall prevent workers around the globe from severe and fatal accidents.

Second: We must aim for reducing inequalities.

Public budgets are a key instrument for solidarity and for reducing disparities. If designed well, they provide a safety net and a stepping stone for the most disadvantaged. But if designed poorly, they encourage wasteful consumption of scarce resources, and divert government resources from the poor. They can hamper development and increase the severity of poverty, leading to radicalization and social unrest.

Fossil fuel subsidies are a case in point. They frequently benefit rich and middle-income households far more than the poor and vulnerable.

Subsidies and taxes are a question of societal justice. I can assure you we once had heated debates on coal subsidies in Germany. Clearly, a major transformation in a society cannot succeed without a widely shared feeling that it is a fair one. It requires social dialogue and participation.

Third: We must not forget the private sector.

The activities of the private sector are the backbone of prosperity. However, they can become a source of grievance if human rights are violated, if labor or environmental standards are circumvented, if rights to land and resources are disregarded. It is our responsibility as policy makers to protect the most vulnerable along supply chains.

Many companies are increasingly aware of their social and ecological impact, aware that an Inclusive Green Economy is in their very own interest. The SDGs provide new momentum to engage in an honest dialogue with the private sector. We need high social and ecological standards, solid regulatory frameworks, comprehensive disclosure rules and an enhanced sustainability risk analysis. The dynamic international debate on Green Finance is a major chance to overcome the current dramatic misallocation of capital.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can only be sure that no one is being left behind if what we do is effective and if we have the disaggregated data to prove it. But when we talk about those left behind, we also always have to question whether the ones ahead are taking the right direction. The HLPF gives us the occasion to jointly examine the direction, using the 2030 Agenda as a compass.

Thank you.