



PHILIPPINE NATIONAL STATEMENT

Accelerating Action and Transformative Pathways – Realizing the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

The current global pandemic has threatened - and continues to put at risk - lives and livelihoods globally and has forced us to rethink the way we have been doing things. Its impacts on public health systems, economies, and education, among others, are already staggering in the short-term. It has exposed and exacerbated underlying and prevailing issues of inefficient social safety nets, rising inequalities, and climate change, limiting and even reversing development gains in the past decade.

Thus, in the year that countries are supposed to jump start accelerating action and carving out transformative pathways to realize the Decade of Action towards the achievement of the SDGs, States are overwhelmed and strained to grapple with unprecedented impacts of COVID-19, which threaten to reverse the already limited and spotty progress in terms of achieving the SDGs.

In this bleak context, strategic actions, strengthened and purposeful multi-sectoral partnerships, and international cooperation have glaringly become imperative if we are to recover resilient, sustainable, and equitable – and realize the post-COVID-19 world we want, with no one left behind.

Before the pandemic, the Philippines has had significant headway in the implementation of the SDGs. Having mainstreamed the SDGs in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022, we have aligned our plans and programs of action with the 2030 Development Agenda, enabling us to undertake sustained actions in support of the Goals.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines' poverty rate has substantially declined from 23.3 percent in 2015 to 16.6 percent in 2018. By far, this is the largest decline in the poverty rate, equivalent to 6 million Filipinos lifted from poverty in just three years. The Philippines was on track to halving poverty between 2015 and 2030. In 2019, underemployment and unemployment rates of 13 percent and 4.5 percent, respectively, were at an all-time low. With sustained annual economic growth of 6.4 percent between

2010 and 2019, the country was on track to becoming an upper-middle income country by the end of 2020. Further, based on the SDG Index, the Philippines was likewise on track to meeting the targets for poverty reduction (SDG 1), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and climate action (SDG 13), among others.

However, with the impacts of COVID-19 cutting across sectors, these gains have been halted, with the Philippines anticipated trajectory to upper-middle income status now uncertain. Recognizing the cross-sectoral nature of these impacts and the need for a multi-faceted approach to response and recovery, the Philippines have supported calls and initiatives that promote and strengthen international cooperation and partnerships – such as in the areas of debt relief, peace and security, (ensuring flow of) remittances, and gender equality and women’s rights.

Despite these odds, the pandemic has also been deemed as an opportunity to build back better. Cognizant of emerging and persistent issues brought about by and/or exacerbated by COVID-19, the Philippines continues to anchor its national development plan on the 2030 Agenda. The country’s recovery and response strategy is hinged on accelerating action to address and reverse the impacts of COVID-19 and forging a trajectory to sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

The pandemic has accelerated digitalization of commerce, work spaces, and education, among others. Technology has likewise enabled social protection measures (e.g. cash aid) to reach previously unreached areas in a more efficient manner. However, it has also exacerbated digital divides and exposed glaring technological gaps - in knowledge, access and infrastructure that need to be rectified moving forward. In this regard, innovation cannot be underscored enough. Engaging the academe and research institutions and public-private partnerships to mobilizing science, technology, and innovation (STI) to stimulate an increase in investments in research and development (R&D) in the country towards inclusive and socio-economic growth.

It is also recognized that the global pandemic is as much as an economic and social crisis as it is a health issue. Lockdown measures undertaken to curb the spread of the virus have resulted in business closures and increase in the number of displaced workers. Most vulnerable are those working in the informal economy, most of whom are women, seasonal and migrant workers.

With limited social protection measures in place, immediate, short-term actions were undertaken to allay adverse impacts. These include include cash and in-kind assistance, emergency employment program, livelihood assistance for displaced workers, various loans and grants, repatriation and/or facilitation of social protection measures for overseas Filipinos in their host/destination countries and employers. And as economies cautiously open in efforts to prevent further losses and recover, economic stimulus packages are developed for various sectors – agriculture to ensure food security, support

programs for businesses and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and increased access to finance, including zero interest, no collateral loans for small businesses, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries (AFF)-based enterprises.

This pandemic has also taken place in the year meant to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA). The hard-fought gains achieved towards gender equality are threatened and existing gender inequalities are highlighted. As the UN Secretary General stated, “Women and girls need to be at the center of COVID-19 recovery efforts.”¹ The Philippines ensures that measures undertaken are responsive to the gendered socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Key gender dimensions included in the country’s COVID-19 recovery plans include addressing gender-based violence and the increase in unemployment and lower labor force participation of women.

The abrupt halt in economic activities in efforts to curb the spread of the virus has provided a respite for the environment, resulting in significantly reduced fossil fuel emissions and improved air quality in urban areas. These short-term gains need to be built on to ensure that the economic recovery is undertaken in a sustainable manner – delivering new jobs through a clean, green and just transition, investing in sustainability, and working together as an international community. Cooperation and partnerships need to be strengthened to halt further degradation of our remaining ecosystems.

And as we commemorate the 75th year of the United Nations this year amidst great uncertainty, multilateralism and the role of the UN are as important as ever. The pandemic has reminded us of how interconnected we are and that the challenges we all face vary in degree of impact across countries and population groups and as such, cannot be addressed by one entity or country working alone.

Guided by the principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of leaving no one behind, the Philippines remains committed to forge partnerships and foster international cooperation towards a transformative and inclusive pathway to sustainable development.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/put-women-and-girls-centre-efforts-recover-covid-19>