

Summary by the President of the Economic and Social Council of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council at its 2020 session

Introduction

The high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council convened from 7 to 16 July 2020, in a virtual format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It included a three-day ministerial segment, from 14 to 16 July 2020. The Forum brought together 137 ministerial level representatives of governments along with other high-level and senior representatives of Governments, as well as many stakeholders. The deliberations focused on delivering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals during this Decade of Action and Delivery for sustainable development in the new context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

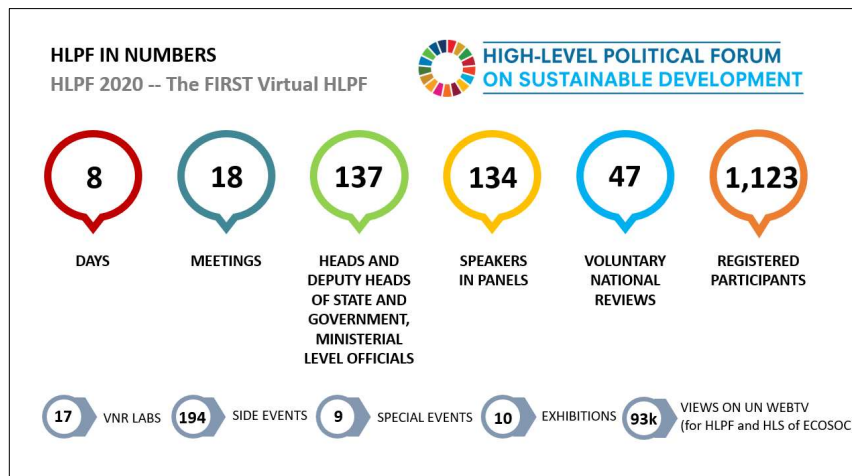
The Forum addressed the theme *"Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development"*. It built on extensive thematic preparations, in-depth preparations of the Voluntary National Reviews as well as the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development. ECOSOC events on the theme and events across the ECOSOC system also contributed to the preparations for the HLPF. The SDG Progress Report of the Secretary-General provided an overview of the world situation regarding the SDGs, highlighting areas of progress and areas where more action needs to be taken to ensure

no one is left behind and combat the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Forty-seven countries carried out voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Governments from all regions thus engaged in discussions with renowned experts and stakeholders on where the world stands on the SDGs in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. They reflected on how the international community can demonstrate solidarity and international cooperation in responding to the pandemic and adopt response measures that put us back on track to achieve the SDGs and accelerate progress during the decade of action.

The meeting produced key messages and concrete policy guidance for policymakers and practitioners on realizing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in the context of COVID-19. Participants emphasized that the world was already not on track to deliver the Goals before the pandemic and, given the impacts of the crisis, the road ahead is steeper. Yet, this can be turned around if all stay true to the 2030 Agenda, including through solidarity and foresight on financing and increasing

investment in public services, including social protection, health systems, education, water, sanitation, and digital connectivity, and pursuing a recovery that builds a more inclusive, gender-responsive and environmentally sound economy. It means reimagining and reshaping the way people



work, learn, live and consume. Countries and stakeholders from all regions also strongly reaffirmed the need to invest in an inclusive and networked multilateralism with the United Nations at the core.

Key messages

Discussions among the participants produced the following key messages:

- 1) SDG progress is uneven, and acceleration is needed in many areas.
- 2) The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed and deepened inequalities between and within countries, and progress toward the SDGs has stalled, and in some cases, reversed.
- 3) All countries are challenged to embark on risk-informed transformative sustainable development pathways to realize the SDGs.
- 4) The 2030 Agenda should be placed at the heart of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic as the guide to build back better.
- 5) Ensuring gender equality and the participation of women, and the promotion and protection of their rights is essential for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to achieving the SDGs.
- 6) Timely and reliable data and statistics are essential to both the immediate COVID-19 response and the longer-term recovery through achievement of the SDGs, so as to support the development and targeting of effective policies and monitoring impacts and progress.
- 7) The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing food systems

challenges, especially in vulnerable countries. Urgent, targeted action is required to prevent a humanitarian emergency.

- 8) Innovative partnerships and institutional mechanisms to finance COVID-19 responses, support economic transitions and build resilience must include renewal of multilateralism, new social contracts, gender equality, financial safety nets, global risk pooling, and a strengthened science-policy interface.
- 9) Nature-based solutions and circular economy approaches should be strengthened and mainstreamed into decision making to support human health and livelihoods, transform economic systems to consume and produce sustainably, manage increased disaster risks and the resulting socioeconomic losses, and address both climate change and biodiversity loss.
- 10) Governance for inclusive societies and whole-of-society approaches are imperative to ensure lasting transformational change and gender equality, requiring action at the national and local levels with women's empowerment and the meaningful engagement of all stakeholders.
- 11) The private sector plays a fundamental role in assuming greater responsibility for promoting sustainable development investments and reshaping the human-nature relationship.

- 12) The COVID-19 pandemic presents, for many, a unique opportunity for the removal of fossil fuel subsidies and phasing out coal, while protecting vulnerable populations with just transition strategies.
- 13) The pandemic is equally a health and an economic crisis for small island developing States (SIDS), as many have seen significant revenue falls in the face of rising debt burdens and other economic impacts of the crisis.
- 14) The contributions of youth, women and vulnerable groups in the LDCs, LLDCs and Africa are critical for shaping the narrative in building a more resilient economic and social fabric.
- 15) The COVID-19 crisis has compounded existing challenges related to the financing of sustainable development. There is a need for greater mobilization of financial resources, quicker disbursements and a more strategic alignment of resources.
- 16) Public finance for sustainable development will remain critical, and it is important to safeguard tax revenues, tackle debt challenges, and protect ODA budgets. The importance of development cooperation was highlighted as an investment.
- 17) To mobilise resources at scale and more quickly, it is important to increase investment in multilateral development banks and expand concessional finance and lenders to explore new ways of lending to ease

- debt burdens and increase the fiscal space of countries
- 18) The UN was called upon to advance more extensive debt related measures, such as cancellation of debt for up to four years and provision of additional concessional funding without conditionalities.
 - 19) Science, technology and innovation are critical tools to advance SDG implementation during the Decade of Action and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging technologies must be harnessed towards promoting equity and sustainability.

Thematic review

Launching the decade of action at a time of crisis: Keeping the focus on the SDGs while combatting COVID-19

The Secretary-General's SDG Progress Report states that one-third of the way into the SDG journey, progress has been uneven, and acceleration is needed in many areas. Siloed approaches continue to hinder progress, not only in the implementation of the SDGs but also in the global response to COVID-19, which is threatening the achievements already made in many areas. The world has a shared responsibility to safeguard development gains and ensure that the response to COVID-19 is guided by the principle of leaving no one behind so that recovery leads to more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies, and more resilient societies.

African countries are coping with unexpected spending in the social and health sectors due to the pandemic, with additional measures to keep the economic sector stable. Poor and vulnerable populations are most affected, with around 20 million Africans likely to fall into extreme poverty. The pillars of agriculture,

infrastructure, energy, industry, and digitalization must be supported, along with mobilizing domestic resources, combatting illicit financial flows, increasing foreign investment, and strengthening public-private partnerships.

Many speakers emphasized the importance of strong institutions in the context of disruptions in health and nutrition services and the impact of school closures on children across the globe as well as in responding to the challenges of green growth and climate resilience. Many highlighted the need for multilateral cooperation and transparency, along with engaging local communities and civil society.

“Building back better” after COVID-19 implies three aspects: building fairer societies, by creating a safety net for the most vulnerable, investing in public health and education in order to leave no one behind; building together, coming to terms with existing patterns of discrimination and racism and providing strong roles for women in recovery efforts; and building more sustainably, by investing in green and circular industries that put our economy on the path of realizing the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement. Many of the participants focused on one or more of these aspects of the challenge posed by the pandemic.

There were also deliberations on the need for a re-valuation of important work that benefits societies going beyond economic aspects, such as the work done in the health and social sectors, which have proven to be crucial in answering the crisis over the past months. In addition, public-private partnerships need to invest in transformative ways of collaborating, such as through tax responsibility, low-carbon footprints and responsible investing, to benefit the greater good of all in society.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made SDG financing even more difficult. For example, FDI is expected to decline by up to 40 per cent in 2020 as a result of delayed investment caused by the shock in global demand, and by a further 5 to 10 per cent in 2021. Participants presented

initiatives, including relief packages, stimulus packages and revamped social protection programmes, to mitigate the adverse impact on highly affected groups and sectors posed by the pandemic, including assistance for informal and irregular workers, and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in particular. Many also discussed strengthening health systems and the delivery of universal health care, a “one health” approach, expanding coverage of existing social protection initiatives, job creation, and increasing public investments. The integration of a gender perspective in these responses is crucial. Some participants also highlighted the need to redouble actions to achieve the 2020 targets of the 2030 Agenda.

The Forum recognized the role of timely and disaggregated data in guiding COVID-19 decision-making as the world moves from response to recovery, and in the implementation of the SDGs. Statistics have become even more important during the pandemic due to the need to combat its effects and monitor its impact on health, economies and society. Mobilization of international and domestic resources to increase investment in national data and statistical systems is imperative for building back better and accelerating implementation of the SDGs.

Building back better after COVID-19 and acting where we will have the greatest impact on the SDGs

Protecting and advancing human wellbeing and ending poverty

The Forum agreed that protecting and advancing human wellbeing and ending poverty is fundamental to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, cuts across multiple sustainable development goals and targets, and requires action on many fronts.

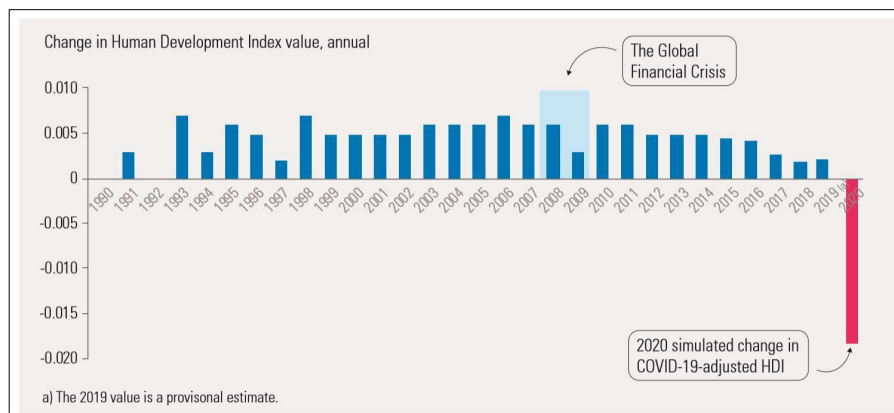
The pandemic has revealed the fragility of the world and has also made finding solutions for adequate financing for sustainable development and the achievement of the SDGs even more urgent. It has also revealed shortcomings in access to essential services like health care, social protection, schooling and learning opportunities, decent work, nutrition services, digital technologies, the Internet and others—all experienced most severely by those living in poverty and by marginalized people and groups. Participants called for inclusive strategies to ensure that the poor have access to the tools and assistance they need to protect against the COVID-19 pandemic and other shocks and that those furthest behind play a role in the development of their communities.

Many emphasized the relationship between environmental sustainability and human wellbeing. Environmental degradation and climate change undermine past gains—for example with the spread of zoonotic diseases and extreme weather—and threaten the wellbeing of current and future generations. Speakers noted that human development progress has in most cases been associated with environmental degradation and advocated for

low-emissions pathways that could advance wellbeing and gender equality and eradicate poverty, while lowering environmental pressures that could reverse such gains. This requires partnerships across sectors and the application of science and technology.

Ending hunger and achieving food security

The Forum noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges facing food systems, especially in vulnerable countries, causing an alarming breakdown of food supply



Source: UNDP. *COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery, 2020.*
http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/covid-19_and_human_development_0.pdf

chains, food shortages in many developing countries and a sharp increase in people suffering from acute food insecurity. Urgent action is required to prevent the pandemic from becoming a hunger and nutrition emergency.

A transformative change in food systems is needed immediately to ensure sustainability and resilience. This requires change in the way food is produced, processed and distributed along the value chain, as well as a change towards healthy diets and increased investment in resilience. Some speakers emphasized that food security and nutrition should be at the center of the emergency response to COVID-19 and building back better. Others noted that food systems and nutrition patterns are one of the entry points for transformation identified in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report and looked forward to the 2021 Food Systems Summit.

Many speakers emphasized the need to involve vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, and indigenous peoples in decision-making and take their needs and rights into account. Some stressed the importance of ensuring access to markets and means of implementation, such as finance, knowledge sharing and training for rural farmers; the role of science, technology and innovation for sustainable agriculture; and the need for a reduction in inequalities and a more equitable distribution of resources for long-term improvement in livelihoods and food security.

Responding to the economic shock, relaunching growth and sharing economic benefits and addressing developing countries' financing challenges

The Forum noted that as households cope with a loss of income, and to avoid selling assets that will be essential for recovery, they are forgoing health care, and cutting food consumption while also facing losses of schooling and other human capital.

Emergency policies should provide immediate income support to those most in need and help maintain a minimal level of economic activity while being flexible to respond and adapt to unique conditions.

Many agreed that the COVID-19 response should also address the climate crisis. For this, resources would need to be directed toward low-carbon infrastructures and climate-friendly job growth, while ensuring a just transition for workers and enterprises. One speaker proposed a global risk pooling reserve fund to reduce health and climate-related risks that would help to strengthen multilateralism and assist countries in managing and responding to chronic risks.

There was a call for innovative partnerships and institutional mechanisms to finance COVID-19 responses, support economic transitions and build resilience with support for countries in special situations, ensure the participation of women, and prioritize the needs of women,

children, refugees and displaced persons. Proposals included new social contracts to address risk, financial safety nets, public-private partnerships, strengthening science for decision-making, and debt swaps for SDG investments. The Finance in Common Summit to take place in November 2020 will provide a space for further discussion.

Protecting the planet and building resilience

The Forum emphasized the inherent interdependence between human development and a healthy planet, highlighting that the achievement of poverty eradication and socioeconomic development depends on addressing drivers of unsustainable natural resource management practices, such as climate change, deforestation and other terrestrial and marine ecosystem degradation as well as managing increased disaster risks and their socioeconomic losses.

Many participants highlighted that conservation, restoration and sustainable use of ecosystems and their landscapes and seascapes offer a proven and cost-effective opportunity to recover better, fairer and greener from the COVID-19 pandemic and get back on track to achieve the SDGs, with integrated approaches for transforming economic systems, including through nature-based solutions and circular economy approaches, which can ensure that societies and ecosystems become more resilient to shocks.

Participants stressed the importance of governance for peaceful, just, and inclusive societies and whole of society approaches, and the role of the private sector in supporting investments and financing targeting environmental dimensions, and assuming greater responsibility for reshaping the relationship between humans and nature; implementing existing commitments, such as the UN Strategic Plan for Forests; and supporting a coherent approach to the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Sustaining efforts to ensure access to sustainable energy

The Forum agreed that ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all by 2030 will open a new world of opportunities for billions of people through new economic opportunities and jobs, empowered women, children and youth, better education and health, more sustainable, equitable and inclusive communities, and greater protections from, and resilience to, climate change impacts. Participants emphasized the importance of people-centered climate action and agreed that accelerating the energy transition will be particularly crucial to achieve climate objectives, as energy use accounts for about two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions. Sustainable energy for all also includes gender sensitive solutions. Some called for countries to integrate more ambitious targets and policies into their enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions.

Participants stated that measures to safeguard and promote the renewable energy industry and to quickly extend access to renewable energy technologies in underserved areas, including through public and private finance, are critical in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, and called for the deployment of modern renewables to be scaled up in all end-use sectors, with private sector investment and appropriate governance, institutional and regulatory structures. Innovation is critical in all aspects of the energy system to arrive at zero emissions by 2050, requiring concurrent deployment of various technological options. Digitalization in managing modern energy systems and reducing energy demand growth was highlighted. The High-level Dialogue on Energy to be convened in 2021 provides an important opportunity to forge new transformational partnerships.

Bolstering local action to control the pandemic and accelerate implementation

The Forum stressed the critical role that local and regional governments are playing in

reducing the spread of COVID-19, providing emergency services and in building back better. Speakers noted that provision of basic services— housing, water, sanitation, food systems, mobility, and education—is at the core of local and regional governments’ work.

Representatives referred to numerous initiatives cities and regions are taking to tackle the pandemic and its impacts, such as augmented school food programmes while school is being conducted remotely, strengthening of health systems, increased access to green spaces, smart phone applications for monitoring personal health, efforts to tackle gender-based violence and abuse, and digital platforms for all stakeholders for coordinated responses. The Forum also stressed the interlinked nature of policies, noting that while COVID-19 began as a health crisis, health care cannot be expanded without enhancements in water and sanitation provision, waste management, education, gender equality, and other areas.

Subnational reviews of SDG implementation, also called the Voluntary Local Reviews, were highlighted as useful for increasing local commitment to the SDGs and for integrating the Goals into strategies, budgeting, procurement procedures and other key areas. Inclusion of local and regional governments in the Voluntary National Reviews was also stressed.

Transformative pathways to realize the 2030 Agenda: a whole of society approach taking into account the impact of COVID19 (Stakeholder perspective)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating and highly disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable communities, notably women, children, persons with disabilities, youth, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable groups identified in the 2030 Agenda in communities all over the world, exacerbating pre-existing economic, social, and

environmental inequalities and threatening the achievement of the SDGs. To effectively address the far-reaching impact of the pandemic and to accelerate SDG implementation, it is imperative that governments adopt an inclusive, whole of society approach and mobilize all key stakeholders, including civil society actors, the private sector, local governments and representatives from marginalized groups, in the post COVID-19 recovery efforts and fully engage them in the implementation, follow-up and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.

The Forum highlighted the important role played by civil society and the private sector in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and holding governments accountable. Several participants stressed that it was critical to fully engage youth in SDG implementation and called for generational change in the Decade of Action. Some participants voiced concerns regarding shrinking civic space, increases in digital surveillance and the passage of repressive laws by some governments in the context of the pandemic. Some stressed that meaningful participation requires protection of liberty and other basic freedoms for all and cautioned that denial of civic space makes inequality less visible. Overall, the participation and voice of women must be included to ensure the transformative pathways needed.

Mobilizing international solidarity, accelerating action and embarking on new pathways

Small island developing States

The Forum noted that for SIDS, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only caused a humanitarian disaster but has also paralysed key sectors, such as tourism. This sector was one of the first and hardest hit, resulting in billions in losses and substantial increases in unemployment. The meeting also noted that although most SIDS are considered middle-income, they are constrained by high public debt due in part to their constant need for financing to recover from the structural damages caused by climate-related disasters.

Although SIDS were quick to adopt a broad range of economic and fiscal policies and measures to mitigate the social and economic effects of the pandemic, many of these will substantially widen fiscal deficits and increase debt levels for these countries. Participants reiterated that international solidarity is required to support access to sustainable financing, debt forgiveness and relief, including for middle-income countries. Highly indebted economies must be allowed to benefit from official debt relief or generous debt standstills, as well as debt restructuring. Tailored responses suitable to local conditions must be developed and strengthened by international cooperation.

African countries, least developed countries and landlocked developing countries

Resilience in LDCs, LLDCs and Africa is threatened by inequality and unemployment across populations and political-economic policies being rolled out to reduce government budget deficits. It is important that broader development needs and population wellbeing be considered in enhancing resilience and building back better. Many emphasized greater support for technology capacity building, food security and long-term investment, debt relief, and additional grants and concessional financing.

Participants underlined that although progress has been made on the SDGs, significant challenges remain, and the pandemic threatened to roll these modest achievements back. LDCs, LLDCs and African countries needed to invest in building resilience to insulate against future crises, with continued financial support from international partners, including commitments on ODA, debt relief, trade, investment and other sources of finance. Many emphasized the need to leave no one behind, especially young people, women and the most vulnerable.

The African Union's collective effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 was cited as an example of regional level action helping to promote coordinated and coherent action across many sectors. Several government

representatives highlighted the actions they were undertaking bilaterally with some LDCs, LLDCs and African countries, and through their contributions to multilateral institutions. The role of the IFIs was emphasized in this regard. The upcoming LDC V Conference in Doha to be held in 2021 offers an opportunity to renew commitments for this group of countries.

Are we leaving no one behind in eradicating poverty and working towards the 2030 Agenda?

Many countries underlined that COVID-19 is pushing the poorest and most vulnerable people further behind. Several countries called for a renewed political commitment to intensify and accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, and some emphasized the importance of global solidarity and multilateralism. Strengthening cooperation among and within countries through cross-sectoral pathways and partnership with the private sector and civil society were broadly recommended, as well as engaging and empowering women and youth in particular and including the participation of the most vulnerable groups and individuals in political decision-making.

Countries shared their policies and practices for reducing inequalities, including through aligning long-term development plans with the SDGs, placing job creation and poverty eradication at the centre of development, installing integrated early warning systems, strengthening social protection system, and ensuring universal access to healthcare and quality education. The discussion recognized that the pandemic has given rise to discrimination, racism and violence, and exacerbated inequality in access to housing, health service, education and ICTs. Women and girls, children and youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, older persons, ethnic minority and refugees are among the most impacted and vulnerable in this situation. Some countries also called attention to the most vulnerable countries, including the LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and countries in conflict situations.

The session highlighted that strengthening or establishing universal social protection and healthcare systems are essential to reduce economic insecurity. Directing fiscal policy towards protecting the vulnerable and building progressive tax schemes are imperative to ensure leaving no one behind. Speakers noted the importance of universal, affordable and safe access to ICTs, and called for disaggregated data to identify the most vulnerable populations and undertake evidence-based policymaking. Several participants called for a “people’s vaccine”, access to adequate housing and land, legislation on violence against women, reproductive health, and decent jobs for youth.

Means of implementation to match the scope of the crisis and the breadth of our ambition for 2030

Mobilizing well-directed financing

The financing of sustainable development was a dominant theme in the debate on how to emerge from the pandemic. As economies are slowly reopening, countries have the opportunity to build back better. Countries must strive to build greener, more sustainable and resilient economies in the post-pandemic world, addressing comprehensively inherent systemic and structural vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic. It is important to address structural inequalities and integrate a gender lens in policy measures. Furthermore, the need for systemic changes at the global level was stressed to ensure that vulnerable countries are not being left behind in the recovery.

The pandemic has also demonstrated the need for greater investment in social welfare and climate change programs. The 2020 FFD Forum and its outcome issued a clear call for action.

In the current global economic slowdown, development cooperation is vital and must be risk-informed and climate-smart to ensure sustained recovery. International public finance for development is fundamental for building national capacities and recovering from the crisis, given the sharp fall in external financial

flows and tax revenues in many countries. Re-examining international tax regulations and other efforts to boost capacities for tax mobilisation is critical for ensuring effective domestic resource mobilisation. Illicit financial flows must be addressed.

The President of ECOSOC and the President of the General Assembly jointly launched in March 2020 the High-level Panel on International Financial Accountability, Transparency and Integrity for Achieving the 2030 Agenda (FACTI Panel). The Panel will contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and offer evidence-based recommendations, building on the successes and ongoing work of existing mechanisms in this area.

The private sector plays a key role in advancing sustainable development solutions, including by adopting an Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)/SDG investment lens. To bridge inequalities and address the gap of financial inclusion, start-ups are increasingly and leveraging technology. Adoption of technological progress in SMEs and across the private sector are vital for a sustained recovery.

Science, technology and innovation

The COVID-19 crisis has reconfirmed that international cooperation for STI is essential and that investment should be made in building STI capacity, as well as recognizing and fully utilizing existing capacity in developing countries so that no region is left behind. The gender divide in technology and science was also addressed. Many participants observed that the digital divide persists between and within countries, and frontier technologies and artificial intelligence could deepen this divide if decisive and innovative actions are not taken to make STI more inclusive and equitable. Access for vulnerable groups should be prioritized, and STI solutions should incorporate diverse sources, including local and traditional knowledge, community-generated knowledge, and the social sciences. The current crisis illustrates this imperative and highlights the

importance of efforts to combat misinformation.

The Forum agreed that the need to “build back better” is clear in the context of STI, particularly for unemployed workers who may find that the employment landscape, already in the process of transformation through automation and globalization, will be permanently changed. STI can be part of the solution if approached in an equitable and inclusive manner and treated as a global public good whenever possible.

Participants welcomed the role of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism launched in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the inter-agency task team on science, technology and innovation and the 10-member group of experts involved in its work, the STI Forum and the Online Platform on existing STI initiatives, mechanisms and programmes.

Messages from the Regions

A resilient recovery from the disruption to lives and economies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic calls for a robust regional response. The regional platforms serve a crucial role in connecting the national and global action on the SDGs. The five Regional Commissions have taken a data-driven approach to understand if the regions are on track to achieve the ambition and transformative paths called by the 2030 Agenda. Yet challenges remain in addressing the lack of quality disaggregated data, including regarding gender, that is critical for evidence-based policymaking as well as the ability of the regions to measure progress accurately.

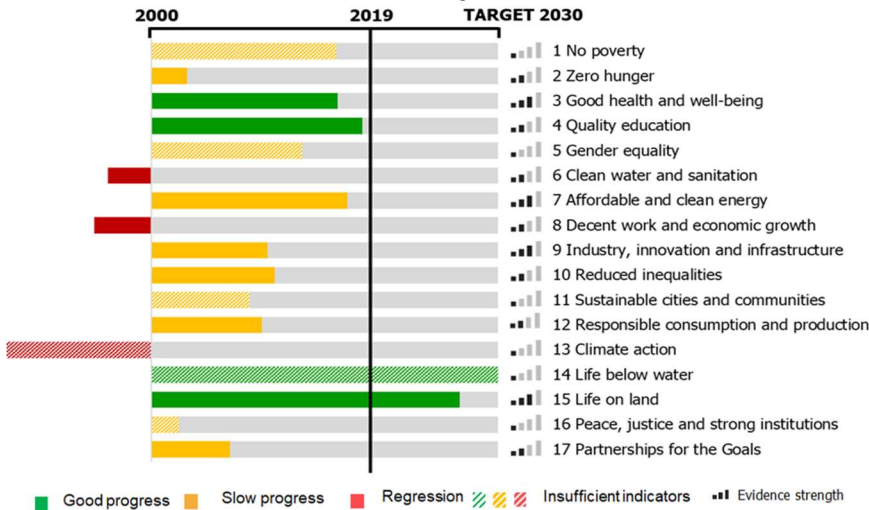
Results from the ongoing work across all five regions show progress is insufficient to achieve all SDGs by 2030. COVID-19 is adding serious challenges and daring complexity to the situation at the regional level. Regional COVID-19 observatories, policy monitoring and tracking tools as well as dedicated knowledge hubs have been created by the Regional Commissions, which have become regional public goods. Regional collaboration and actions

that foster peer-learning, best practices and policy solutions should be fully leveraged in

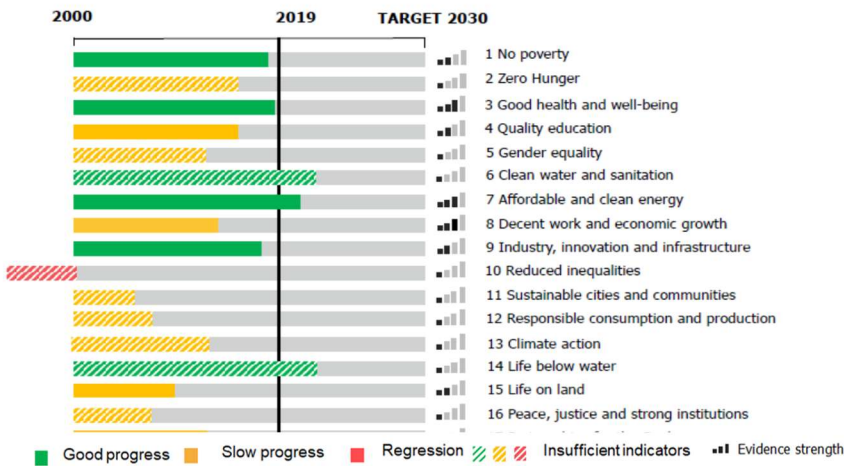
building back better after a cross-border challenge such as a pandemic

Implementation progress in the regions

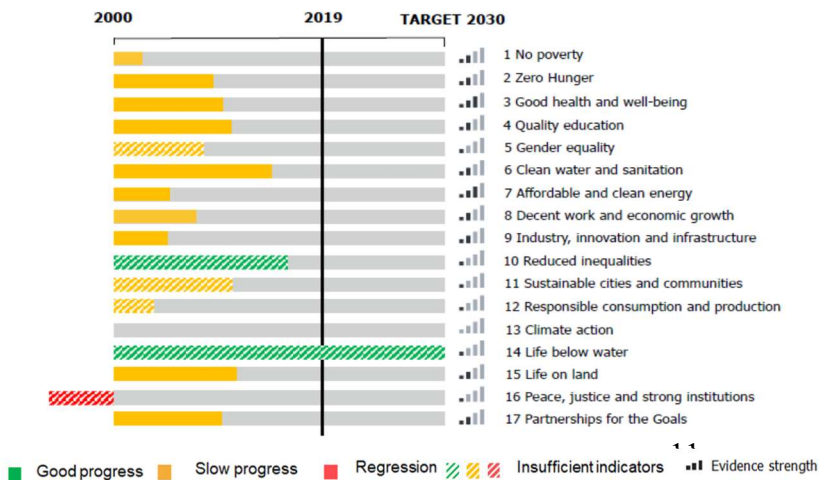
1. Latin America and the Caribbean region



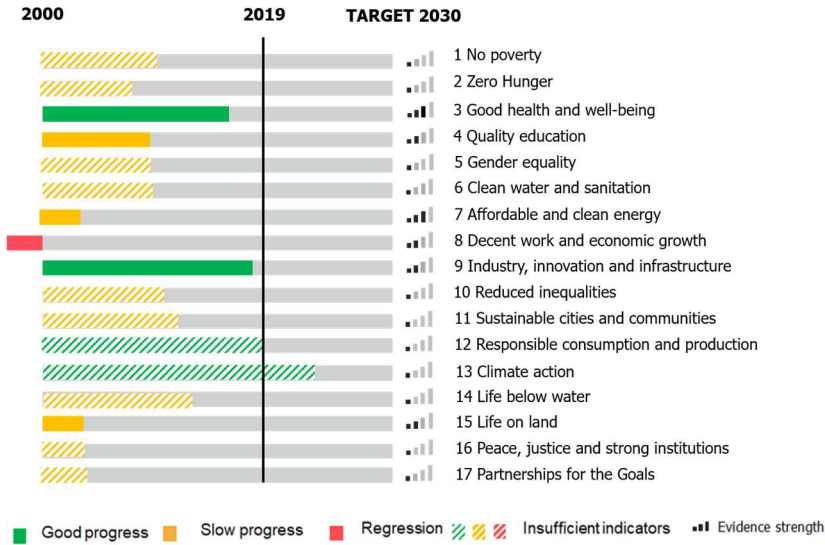
2. Central and Eastern Europe region



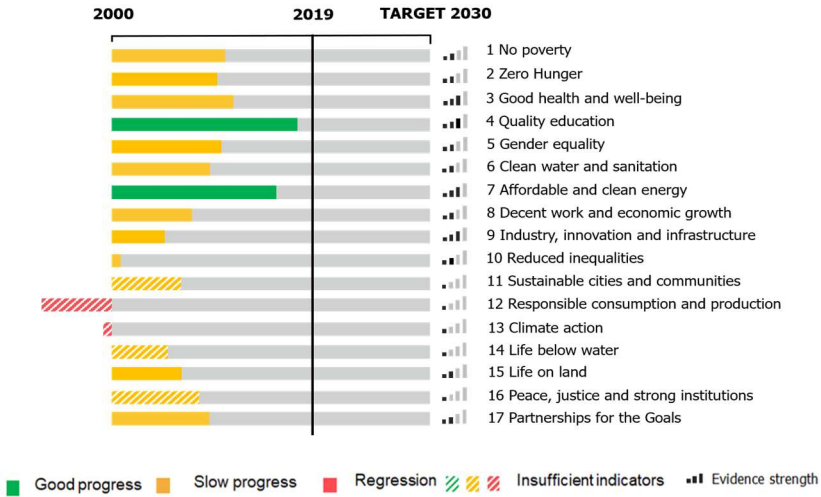
3. African region



4. Arab region



5. Asia-Pacific region



Voluntary National Reviews

Forty-seven countries carried out Voluntary National Reviews of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda.¹

Many countries emphasized that the SDGs provide an important framework for national development policies, and highlighted efforts to incorporate the 2030 Agenda in national development strategies and align them with national development plans, facilitating policy coherence and integration. Some countries described a whole-of-society approach involving extensive consultations with key segments of civil society, including the private sector. New laws and regulations have been enacted in some countries to address the needs of vulnerable segments of society.

Strong leadership and sustainable financing were seen as important for achieving the 2030 Agenda. Presenting countries and discussants noted that the establishment of SDG coordination structures to lead and monitor SDG implementation, for example, through a National Commission on Sustainable Development headed by the Prime Minister, ensured that the SDGs are mainstreamed and prioritized across different government ministries. One country noted that lack of a national coordination mechanism for SDG implementation had hampered the VNR process and indicated that it would prioritize the establishment of such a mechanism with the participation of both government and a broad representation of stakeholders.

Countries cited the impact of COVID-19 as likely to limit growth. Some stressed that the pandemic had adversely affected education, health, agriculture, manufacturing and trade sectors, with a devastating impact on the livelihoods of the most vulnerable. Whole of government and whole of society approaches were advocated to ensure a coordinated response to the pandemic, with establishment of national coordination committees to

evaluate risks and provide advice on preparedness, prevention and response.

In some countries, funds have been set up for the management of the pandemic to support the health system, mitigate the impact of the crisis on families and businesses, and develop communications and digitalization. Response measures included direct cash transfer programmes targeting low-income families, SMEs, micro-enterprises and small farmers, as well as operationalizing stimulus packages that include several reform and relief measures across sectors. Countries underscored that resources are needed to address COVID-19.

To leave no one behind, countries are addressing the needs of vulnerable groups and ensure equal opportunities for everyone, including ethnic minorities, children with special needs, and communities in remote areas. Some countries presented measures to enhance women's empowerment and representation in decision-making, financial inclusion and education. Many called for gender mainstreaming and actions to ensure gender equality. Others highlighted social protection programmes involving cash transfers to vulnerable groups; support programmes for women, youth and the elderly; job creation and youth empowerment.

Countries identified key areas for accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda including partnerships, coordination and collaboration, advocacy for the 2030 Agenda, innovation, strengthening data, monitoring and reporting on the SDGs.

The means of implementation continues to be a major concern for most countries in their pursuit of the SDGs. The shock of cyclical disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic have negatively impacted efforts, redirecting much-needed resources. Presenting countries emphasized the need for sustained financing and technical support. Financing for sustainable development, both domestic and

¹ See Annex

internationally, remains essential. One country aligned its internal budgeting process for line ministries with the SDGs; others noted their contributions through official development assistance to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda internationally.

Countries also presented specific initiatives in means of implementation in support of the SDGs. One country set up a special multisectoral and integrated initiative for financing the SDGs and to ensure that no one is left behind. In another, local authorities prioritized 10 of 49 national targets and identified nine strategic SDGs as entry points in an effort to leave no one behind through an “Insurance for Human Capital Strengthening” programme. Efforts are being made to digitalize public administration, including the creation of a dedicated ministry. A federal programme for vulnerable communities and persons with disabilities offers an integrated approach to fight hunger and multidimensional poverty.

Presenting countries and discussants emphasized that the engagement of all stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is key to achieving inclusive and sustainable development and ensuring that no one is left behind. Localized SDGs ensure coherence in achieving the targets and support national indicator frameworks for timely and effective monitoring. Several countries noted the importance of academia and research institutions in analyzing data and generating concrete steps forward in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The private sector is an important partner, and more must be done to integrate the SDGs into value chains through corporate social responsibility and human rights initiatives. Countries also noted efforts to raise awareness of SDGs within the general public.

Some countries emphasized the importance of addressing climate change to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, through adaptation plans, creation of green economies and low-carbon innovations. Mobilizing domestic and foreign financing for climate

change adaptation, addressing consumption and production patterns and halting biodiversity loss remains extremely challenging.

Countries highlighted challenges in statistical data collection and presented measures to strengthen their national statistical systems and to ensure the availability of quality, reliable, accurate and timely data to measure progress and shape policies. Stronger coordination systems are needed for monitoring and evaluation, especially for data collection and harmonization at a more detailed level.

General Debate

Due to the virtual nature of the 2020 HLPF and ECOSOC High-level Segment, the General Debate consisted of the submission of 119 written and video statements. Ninety-eight were received from Member States and Observers, 15 from Major Groups and other stakeholders and six from UN entities.

The current and future impact of the COVID-19 pandemic featured prominently in the General Debate. Participants highlighted that the pandemic has exposed the world’s vulnerabilities, revealing fault lines of inequalities within and among countries pertaining to poverty and social protections, including access to healthcare, gender equality and decent and productive employment. Recognising that progress toward the 2030 Agenda is already off track, many cautioned that SDG implementation will now be even more challenging. Yet there was strong resolve to build back better after COVID-19 by building greener, fairer and together.

Participants underscored the 2030 Agenda as the roadmap for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; noted the unique opportunity to pursue the transformative changes needed to achieve the SDGs; and discussed how to improve preparedness and resilience to unexpected risks and exogenous factors.

Multilateralism, international cooperation and global solidarity were heralded throughout the

General Debate as essential to finding effective, lasting solutions to COVID-19, as well as other threats to sustainable development, particularly climate change. Delegations emphasized that collaborative partnership with all countries and all stakeholders is needed to scale-up coordinated action for the future, which includes providing for the most vulnerable. Global leadership was repeatedly deemed essential to put the world on track to achieve the ambition of the SDGs by 2030.

Five years since its adoption, many member States recommitted to the 2030 Agenda. Several noted with concern that extreme poverty could rise dramatically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many highlighted specific national measures taken to alleviate the economic impact of the pandemic on households and businesses, including postponing tax payments, mortgage repayments and business loans, alongside increased government spending on health and social services, particularly in education, employment, housing and food security.

Most member States highlighted the need to urgently combat climate change hand-in-hand with recovery from COVID-19. Reiterating support for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, many called for building back greener and transitioning to climate-friendly, low-carbon and circular economies that minimise waste and biodiversity loss while harnessing clean and renewable energy.

Multiple delegations emphasized that in order to meet the scale and ambition of the 2030 Agenda, the means of implementation must be strengthened, particularly in the areas of finance, international trade, technology transfer, capacity building and partnerships. Building back better will require mobilizing all sources of financing – public and private, international and domestic. Many delegations underlined the continuing importance of Official Development Assistance for achieving the SDGs, alongside more innovative financial strategies to fill the SDGs financing gap. Some Member

States expressed the need to move beyond country classifications based on macroeconomic indicators and consider the specific challenges and vulnerabilities of each country. Some highlighted the important role of South-South and triangular partnerships in realizing the 2030 Agenda. Private sector engagement to meet investment shortfalls was also noted as critical.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the agreed conclusions and recommendations of the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development follow-up were recalled as guiding instruments. Participants acknowledged increasing challenges in securing adequate finance for development programmes as a result of the pandemic.

Annex: 2020 VNR countries

1. Argentina**
2. Armenia**
3. Austria*
4. Bangladesh**
5. Barbados*
6. Benin***
7. Brunei Darussalam*
8. Bulgaria*
9. Burundi*
10. Comoros*
11. Costa Rica**
12. Democratic Republic of the Congo*
13. Ecuador**
14. Estonia**
15. Finland**
16. Gambia*
17. Georgia**
18. Honduras**
19. India**
20. Kenya**
21. Kyrgyzstan*
22. Liberia*
23. Libya*
24. Malawi*
25. Federated States of Micronesia*
26. Morocco**
27. Mozambique*
28. Nepal**
29. Niger**
30. Nigeria**
31. North Macedonia*
32. Panama**
33. Papua New Guinea*
34. Peru**
35. Republic of Moldova*
36. Russian Federation*
37. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines*
38. Samoa**
39. Seychelles*
40. Slovenia**
41. Solomon Islands*
42. Syrian Arab Republic*
43. Trinidad and Tobago*
44. Uganda**
45. Ukraine*
46. Uzbekistan*
47. Zambia*

* First time presenters (26 countries)

** Second time presenters (20 countries)

*** Third time presenters (1 country)