



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2018 HLPF Background Note - Implementing the SDGs: Lessons from the regions

Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies: key regional trends

The 2030 Agenda recognizes the pivotal role of the regional dimension to promote integration and cooperation and translate global goals into national sustainable development realities. Progress towards sustainable and resilient societies requires regional cooperation to develop and implement integrated development strategies and to address the transboundary dimension of the SDGs in an effective way. Three years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Member States in all regions have taken significant steps in the integration of the SDGs in national and regional development plans and budgets and in the establishment of planning and monitoring mechanisms. As the focus turns to implementation, regional efforts must be redoubled in particular to address gaps in the means of implementation and strengthen statistical capacities, mobilize finance and enhance innovation.

Africa

In Africa, despite high growth rates in the past decade, slow progress has been recorded in reducing poverty (SDG1). The high rates of inequality (SDG 10) in the region need to be tackled if the poor, mainly women and youth, are not to be left behind. There has been improvement in access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation (SDG 6). Increasing access drinking water requires enhanced efforts to address climate change (SDG 13) which is one of the drivers of water stress in the region. Efforts to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and enhance climate change adaptation and mitigation are central to progress to resilient and sustainable societies in the region. Infrastructure deficits undermine industrial development in the region (SDG 9). Regarding SDG 7, although rising, access to electricity in Africa is low by global standards. There are concerns that given the policies that are currently in place, it is unlikely that access to affordable and clean energy for all will be achieved in region by 2030. Africa is also experiencing rapid population growth and is the world's fastest urbanizing region (SDG 11). The pace towards food security (SDG 2) and sustainable consumption and consumption patterns (SDG 12) needs to be increased alongside strengthened and sustainable planning and development of urbanization. Regarding life on land (SDG 15), Africa outperforms most of the world's regions in the conservation and sustainable use of its mountain resources. However, overall, the rate of loss of forest cover in the region is much higher than the global average. Supporting member States in integrated



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HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

implementation of the mutually reinforcing SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063 constitutes the main thrust of ECA's strategic framework.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean lifted 65 million people out of poverty and a further 15 million from extreme poverty between 2002 and 2014 (SDG 1) thanks to a relatively high growth rate and its favourable effects on employment and wages. However, the uncertain global economy of recent years and the region's recent growth rates of around 1% pose a challenge to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region (SDG 8). The progress made with reducing inequality (SDG 10) seen in most of the countries after 2002 came to a halt in 2015 and, in some cases, the gains have been lost, partially because of a slower growth of employment. Further, the region faces structural challenges of the inequalities between women and men (SDG 5): for example on average 29% of women aged over 15 in Latin America have no income of their own, while the figure for men is 12.5%. The agricultural sector is the main user of water resources in the region (SDG 6), using an average of 70% of the total, followed by households (17%) and industry (13%). Moreover, 88% of the urban population had access to improved sanitation facilities in 2015, (SDG 11) but urban sanitation is still one of the main challenges facing the region's governments. In the region, 66% of the energy used in urban transport is consumed by individual vehicles (automobiles and motorcycles) while public transport buses consume 30% and rail-borne modes of transport use 4%. The energy matrix of the region is relatively dependent on oil, which accounts for 46% of the region's total primary energy matrix, compared to the world average of 31%. However, oil has been substituted by natural gas, which now makes up 23% of the region's primary energy matrix (SDG 7). Latin American and Caribbean is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change (SDG 13) and the estimated economic costs of climate change in the region from 2010 to 2050 will amount to between 1.5% and 5% of the region's GDP. Since 1990, Latin America and the Caribbean has lost 9.4% of its forested areas and in South America forest cover went from 52.2% in 1990 to 47.7% in 2015 (SDG 15).

Asia and the Pacific

Asia and the Pacific is set to fall short of achieving the UN's 2030 Agenda at its current rate of progress. There has been some welcome progress, including in some of the least developed countries of our region. Healthier lives are being led and wellbeing has increased (Goal 3). Poverty levels are declining, albeit too slowly (Goal 1). Innovation is powering new industries and infrastructure (SDG 9). But only one SDG, focused on achieving quality education and lifelong



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HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

learning (Goal 4), is on track to be met. In several critical areas, the region is heading in the wrong direction. Environmental stewardship is seriously inadequate. The health of our oceans has deteriorated since 2015 (Goal 14). On land, the region's ecosystems' biodiversity is threatened (Goal 15). Forest conservation and the protection of natural habitats has weakened. Greenhouse gas emissions are still too high (Goal 13). And there is a great deal more required to promote decent work and inclusive economic growth (Goal 8). Yet it is widening inequalities, between and among countries, during a period of robust growth, which are particularly striking (Goal 10). None of these challenges can be overcome overnight. But an integrated, coordinated and targeted approach can overtime return Asia Pacific's economies and societies to a sustainable footing. It is this approach, which ESCAP's analysis, technical assistance and intergovernmental work, is relentlessly focused on supporting.

Economic Commission for Europe Region

In the diverse UNECE region, the overall picture remains mixed. There has been good progress in the elimination of poverty (SDG 1). However, much needs to be done in other areas, including regarding SDGs where the region has a global responsibility, such as sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12) and climate change (SDG 15). While the economic situation has improved, there are still severe shortcomings regarding SDG 8 (economic growth and employment) and SDG 9 (infrastructure and innovation). Moreover, environmental pressures continue to be strong (SDG 15), despite progress in some areas. In many countries in the region, gender equality is not progressing fast enough (SDG 5). In addition, there is a significant disparity of situations. There are a number of countries that are performing well regarding SDG 3 (health) and SDG 10 (inequality), for example, but in quite a few others the situation is clearly unsatisfactory. Regarding SDG 6 (water), in an increasing number of countries water scarcity is becoming a challenge. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation needs to be improved in parts of the region. Overall, there is a continued need to accelerate SDG implementation, including by exploiting the synergies derived from an integrated approach in policymaking.

Arab Region

From a development perspective, the Arab States region has achieved limited progress on the three dimensions of sustainable development. Marred by geopolitical tensions, violent conflicts leading to massive displacement, as well as occupation, it is evident that progress on SDG-16 is a pre-condition for achieving all other SDGs. In addition to governance and accountability challenges, many developmental gains of the past decades have been reversed in several countries. Moreover, the growth experienced by the relatively stable countries in the past years has fallen short in creating decent work. This has resulted in widening income and social



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HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

inequalities, and flagrant gender differences both in labor participation and employment. Although extreme absolute poverty is declining in non-conflict affected countries, multidimensional poverty and vulnerability remain

major regional challenges. The region also faces a myriad of transboundary environmental challenges ranging from shrinking natural resources, desertification, and increased demand for water and energy due to population growth and climate change, all requiring regional response and cooperation. The region is also marked by extraordinary differences in development achievements on the subregional level. Moving towards sustainability and resilience requires long-term evidence-based development planning and structural transformation towards higher value industries producing decent jobs, and improving labor market access for women, youth and marginalized groups. The Arab states have shown serious commitment to the Agenda and its implementation, with many integrating the SDGs in their national strategies. However, progress to deliver on global commitments and the principle of leaving no one behind requires more and better data and serious collective efforts to mobilize global and intra-regional resources and partnerships.

Conclusion

The regional dimension of sustainable development is critical for an effective and coordinated response to an increasing number of development needs. Regional action can support and complement national plans and is essential to address transboundary challenges. The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires more than the sum of national actions: it calls for collective efforts to tackle regional and global issues. Although realities vary significantly region by region, there is a common need for enhanced regional action to avoid the reversal of gains made during periods of economic growth and achieve the scale of change necessary to build resilient and inclusive societies. Equipped with robust intergovernmental mandates, the UN Regional Commissions are ideally positioned to assist Member States in pursuing their national development objectives, by supporting monitoring efforts, designing integrated and evidence-based policy responses and building the necessary partnerships and technical capacity for effective implementation.

Guiding Questions:

1. What are the key challenges and opportunities for action to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level?
2. What policy approaches applied in the regions are yielding positive results in addressing the SDGs under review?



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HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3. What are the latest trends in the regions in the mobilization of financial resources and other means of implementation (trade, technology)?
4. How is regional, South-South and triangular cooperation evolving in support of the 2030 Agenda?
5. What types of partnerships are being formed at the regional level and could be replicated across regions?
6. How can the regional commissions better support countries in the achievement of their sustainable development agendas?



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