

President's Summary of the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development¹

1. Introduction

The 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) met under the auspices of Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) from 9 to 18 July at the UN Headquarters in New York. During the first week, the Forum undertook an in-depth review of progress on a subset of six of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to water (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7), cities (SDG 11), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12) and terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15), as well as SDG 17 on Means of Implementation which is reviewed annually. This review was undertaken while being mindful of the indivisible, integrated and interlinked nature of the SDGs and of the three dimensions of sustainable development, and thus taking into account cross-cutting, new and emerging issues. The 2018 HLPF also discussed its theme “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies” building on the lessons learned from the regions that held Regional Sustainable Development forums and reflecting on the perspectives of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states as well as on the challenges of middle income countries.

The agreed conclusions of the ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum and a summary of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI Forum) were also shared in plenary meetings of the HLPF. Major groups and other stakeholders (MGoS) organized their own multistakeholder session on the theme. There was also a special focus maintained throughout the meeting on the principle of leaving no one behind.

The HLPF was attended by approximately 2,200 participants, including over 125 Heads and Deputy Heads of State and Government, Ministers, Vice-Ministers and other ministerial-level officials. The HLPF included a three-day Ministerial Segment where 46 countries presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Around 130 speakers served as panelists or lead discussants in official panel discussions. There were 158 speakers during the general debate of the forum, with a quarter of the interventions made by MGoS.

The forum featured 260 side events, and eight special events, including nine SDG learning courses, a Higher Education Sustainability Initiative, an SDG Business Forum, a “Partnership Xchange”, a Local and Regional Governments’ Forum, a “Local 2030” event, a Global Multi-stakeholder SIDS Partnership Dialogue, illustrating the strong commitment by all stakeholders to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda. An inaugural series of eight “VNR Labs” were held on the margins of the Ministerial Segment, providing an informal platform for reflection by Member States, major groups and other stakeholders to take stock of the experience thus far with the VNRs. An HLPF Film Festival and an SDG in Action media event were also held on the margin of the Forum.

This summary reflects the discussions at the 2018 HLPF official sessions, including the general debate on the theme.

¹ Res. 70/299 para. 20. “... invites the President of the Council, in consultation with the Bureau of the Council, to prepare a factual summary to reflect the discussions of the meeting.”

2. How far have we come on the SDGs?

Overall trends:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is presently in its third year of implementation and the HLPF showed that the commitment to reaching the SDGs is stronger than ever.

The Forum agreed that there has been progress in many areas related to the goals and targets (See section XX below). There has also been a widespread adoption of the SDGs into national development plans and strategies and the creation of approaches and structures to promote, coordinate and integrate implementation efforts. A number of countries also noted that they are working to ensure coherence among actions to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, as well as other internationally agreed instruments.

At the same time, the Forum echoed the main message of the Secretary-General's report on *Progress Toward the SDGs* which is that, despite positive trends, there is still a long way to go to reach the Goals. Major disparities in achievements exist, both within and between countries. The LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS continue to lag behind on almost all targets. Middle-income countries, for their part, face their own challenges especially on inequalities.

Indicators such as lowered projections for sustainable economic growth and persistent patterns of inequality are cause for concern, and demand coordinated global action to address the root causes of difficult challenges. Many participants stressed that there is no time to be complacent—the speed of transformative actions will be critical for determining whether we reach the SDGs and ensure sufficient deployment of solutions to disrupt unsustainable patterns and practices.

Delegations noted that poverty and hunger, especially in rural areas, persist; there is a global deficit of social protection, especially towards vulnerable groups; access to water and sanitation services is lacking; and forest areas are decreasing while land degradation is threatening the livelihoods of millions. The increased occurrence of climate change-related disasters increases competition for natural resources, and the rising number of violent conflicts is driving food insecurity. Both developed and developing countries stated that, with the growing migratory flows, the capacity to address the specific needs of migrants are under strain everywhere. Certain populations remain at high risk of being left behind, including women and girls, children and youth, aging, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities. Extreme poverty is more prevalent among women; the current decline in maternal mortality is too slow; and access to health services is lagging.

The issue of human rights was continually raised. Participants reported that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by disasters and conflict, especially when living in poverty, and that many are still deprived of their basic rights. Many said that indigenous peoples are also disproportionately suffering from a lack of recognition of their rights in some countries, and meaningful consultations are often the exception rather than the rule. Some participants reminded the Forum that application of the principle of leaving no one behind could have an even greater positive effect when efforts are made to ensure that those at risk not only receive benefits, but also participate in and contribute to the process of sustainable development.

Overall, it was clear that the momentum around the 2030 Agenda remains strong, and all participants agreed that it is critical to further increase their commitments in working toward next year, when the Forum meets under the auspices of the General Assembly to review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda overall.

Data and statistical capacities

The discussion on data highlighted the positive trend of increasingly recognising the important role of disaggregated data in policy making and in aiming to reach those furthest behind; however, many noted that greater commitment is required, including on the part of national statistical institutions, where lack of official statistics, data and effective monitoring systems remain a significant obstacle to measuring progress, despite the ongoing data revolution. The absence of technology and infrastructure in rural areas presents a challenge. Statistics on inequalities and discrimination are often missing, including between countries, and gender-based violence is difficult to measure, although, in many countries, progress has been made in acknowledging it as a societal crisis.

The Forum acknowledged that high quality, robust, repeatable and sustainable data is also necessary to avoid wasted resources and lost opportunities. In this regard, it is imperative to ensure that the organizations compiling data are independent, objective and transparent, to ensure trust by decision makers and citizens and support comparability between countries. Moreover, it is crucial to collect data from different sources and address the issue of data access by national institutions. Mapping is also essential for finding the right indicators to better target policy interventions and improve effectiveness of policy decisions. Many statistical systems are dependent on outside support, and the use of data by policymakers remains limited, especially in some LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, where statistical officers are sometimes locked in vicious cycles of underfunded and weak capacities. The High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics, through the Cape Town Action Plan, was cited as providing an overall framework for statistical capacity building that can bring countries together and coordinate data financing.

Many agreed that strengthening statistics on vulnerable groups such as women, children and youth, aging, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities will require more and better data, as well as improved use of existing data. Data should therefore be accessible and readable by policy makers. In the process, some speakers reminded the Forum that it is important to consider cultural differences, contexts and starting points, embrace innovation and organisation, and ensure legislative access. Investing in modernisation, improving interdepartmental collaboration, promoting partnerships and technical cooperation, as well as improving technical capacity by focusing on the countries at the bottom of the development index were all noted as important priorities for action. To address the deficit of skills and promote knowledge and resource sharing, South-South Cooperation, peer review mechanisms, and the establishment of regional centres of excellence were all presented as effective solutions. But the political will to support and strategically invest in national statistical systems remains paramount.

3. Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

a. Building resilience

Participants emphasized that building resilience is a complex exercise that requires extensive coordination and planning across various sectors. Actions to achieve resilience can be divided in three areas: reducing current and known risks, controlling future risks, and managing disasters or shocks as they occur. Drivers and underlying causes of disaster risk need to be addressed comprehensively and systematically, taking into account not only their impact on one sector but also the cascading impacts on other sectors. Resilience is critical for every aspect of the SDGs and can be considered an indicator of the overall health of societies in times of rising conflict, political instability and climate change. The specific vulnerabilities of SIDS and LDCs were underscored.

Measures for temporary or partial debt forgiveness have helped countries recover from shocks, and can help direct investment to the most fragile sectors to prepare for future shocks. Economic, trade and social policies should focus on workers and populations rather than on specific jobs or sectors. It is critical to strengthen social protection systems, as they mitigate the effects of shocks, especially for the most vulnerable. A systems-thinking approach and a long-term perspective to build resilience at all levels require investment in human capacity, understanding current and future population trends, timely and targeted investment in the capacities of the youth, adopting a proactive approach, and investing in early warning systems. Speakers also highlighted the role of science and technology in strengthening resilience, the need for partnerships across borders, and the importance of regional cooperation to share experiences in resilience building on a continuous basis.

b. Implementing the SDGs: lessons from the regions

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda needs to take place at all levels. So, along with the national and international levels, the regional level is important. The HLPF discussed this issue and the role of regions to foster coherence between local and global levels with key regional and sub-regional actors, notably the Executive Secretaries of the United Nations Regional Commissions.

Speakers highlighted that economies are growing, and poverty is declining overall but noted that, in general, progress on implementation remains slow. In some regions, the proportion of young people is significant, which puts pressure on the economy, and youth are disproportionately affected by unemployment. Growth is not necessarily inclusive, and inequality among and within countries is on the rise. In particular, gender issues represent a structural challenge. Weakening multilateralism, emerging protectionism, fiscal consolidation, public mistrust in institutions, political fragmentation, rising inequalities and a looming trade war will have an impact on the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Dependency on fossil fuels and the fluctuation of oil prices, as well as disasters caused by climate change, were also identified as obstacles to progress. The compilation of quality indicators, statistics and data is also a challenge, affecting monitoring and assessment of progress.

Inclusive growth, trade and regional integration were highlighted as drivers of change. Access to water was repeatedly cited as a transboundary issue requiring partnerships at the regional level.

Partnerships with the private sector and civil society are a key means of implementation. The establishment of think tanks and scientific centres was highlighted as a good practice for generating knowledge and informing policies and programmes.

Examples of inter-regional and intra-regional partnerships were discussed as a way forward. Several also highlighted the need to increase access to international financing, particularly for countries recovering from conflict.

It was noted that Governments should make greater efforts to tackle corruption, improve connectivity and achieve sustainable mobility by de-carbonizing the transport sector and investing in smart cities and clean energy. With the assistance of regional bodies, the United Nations system, civil society, the private sector, the scientific community, and Governments should design interventions to achieve the SDGs based on the water nexus approach. South-South cooperation was praised as a key mechanism.

The Ministerial Segment included also a reporting by the Chairs of the UN Regional Forums for Sustainable Development on the outcomes of their respective regional forums, underscoring the importance of the regional dimension, which provides both a critical link between the national and global levels as well as an important opportunity to share best practices and facilitate peer-learning.

The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) focused on natural resources, future generations and the common good, and underscored the need for greater cooperation for sustainable management.

The Forum on Sustainable Development for Latin America and the Caribbean focused on citizens' participation, people as the center of actions and the analysis of the strategic advantages of each country in the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Resilience building was considered a pre-requisite for the achievement of the sustainable development goals at the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD). This Forum stressed the importance of inclusive, multi-stakeholder participation, including by disadvantaged, poor, vulnerable and risk-exposed populations, and engagement by all levels of government including subnational and local authorities.

The Africa Regional Forum highlighted some good practices and progress made, as well as challenges. Resilient structural transformation in Africa, in line with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 requires integrated national frameworks that also incorporate inclusion, protecting against climate change and disaster risk reduction.

Key issues in focus at the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region included practical peer learning, universality of SDGs, regional platforms to connect governments and other stakeholders, SDG interlinkages and transboundary issues.

4. Perspectives from Small Island Developing States

Water and energy are inextricably interconnected issues of great significance for all countries, including SIDS. This session discussed the role of sustainable water governance and energy management in transforming SIDS toward resilient societies, especially given prevalent constraints such as climate change, hazardous weather conditions, and financial hardship. Most speakers emphasized that SIDS are adversely and disproportionately affected by climate change. In addition, the energy markets in SIDS are small, isolated, volatile, characterized by high prices, and predominantly dependent on fuel imports. Water governance is often inefficient, with a high share of non-revenue water and inefficient management of wastewater. Several speakers stressed that, as SIDS are commonly characterized by small land areas and

populations, they are usually more dependent on foreign funds and financing. Women should play a central role in developing sustainable water and energy policies.

A cross-sectional approach is needed that focuses on the whole water cycle. Cooperation among SIDS is very important for knowledge transfer, especially among countries from the same region. The efforts that are required extend beyond the monetary dimension and include the improvement of policies and service delivery strategies. The urgency in implementing policies to achieve water and energy-related targets is challenging among SIDS, but there is also opportunity for SIDS to formulate an integrated policy framework to improve sustainability of water, energy and food in the era of climate change.

More investment is required in the energy sectors of SIDS. High international debt and limits to financial resources undermine progress. The international community can assist in reducing barriers to foreign financing. Strong partnerships among private, public, domestic and international sectors are not only critical but also potentially a win-win for all. Local communities should be empowered to manage their own water using technology and infrastructure that is suitable to the conditions of the communities. In addition, everyone should be engaged in forming effective local strategies, and women should play a central role in this process.

5. Perspectives of LDCs, LLDCs, and Middle Income Countries (MICs)

While LDCs, LLDCs and MICs share common priority areas for support, their situations are diverse and there is thus no uniform solution. Each group of countries needs support to address challenges, access financing and ensure that no one is left behind.

Despite disparities among LDCs, their group is characterized by a decline in the GDP growth rate since 2011, which impacts on the prospect of realizing the SDGs and the Istanbul Program of Action for LDCs (IPoA). At the same time, sixteen LDCs now await graduation by 2025, and some are emerging high-performers in areas concerning poverty reduction, public expenditure on education, safe drinking water, Internet usage, and access to electricity. It was found however that LLDCs are making slow progress. It was noted that the High-level midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs (VPOA) would take place in 2019, and one speaker encouraged LLDCs and transit partners to be involved in preparations.

Many agreed that accelerated support for countries in special situations is needed to develop their capacity to pro-actively manage and mitigate climate and environmental change-related events and access available finances. On the latter, it is important to streamline disbursement procedures without compromising transparency and accountability. The development of renewable and decentralized energy systems and sustainable food systems are key; systemic, long-term visions incorporating urban-rural linkages for job creation in food systems, green technology, and tourism at the national and local level can ensure progress. Data from the territorial level, at the granular level, can also reveal the way forward.

MICs make up a heterogeneous group of countries covering most of the world, comprising 5.6 billion people. MICs are also the home of 74 per cent of the world's poor. Enabling environments for sustainable development in MICs must be set at both international and national levels.

Examples of success from these countries provide inspiration for prioritizing the strengthening of global partnerships that address the challenges of LDCs, LLDCs and MICs to benefit all persons—particularly children and youth, aging, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and migrants.

6. *Advancing science, technology and innovation for the SDGs*

Scientific research, evidence and knowledge can help inform policy and action at various levels. Technology and innovation can help speed up progress, often across multiple goals and targets. At the same time, such developments can also have negative impacts, and collaboration involving a wide range of stakeholders is needed to maximize the positive and reduce or eliminate the negative.

The Forum heard the presentation of the Summary of the Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum) presented by the Forum's Co-chairs. The discussion explored policies and actions for advancing STI for achieving the SDGs, as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda. Many participants emphasized that the STI Forum can facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships and contribute to improving the science-policy interface, including through its exhibitions and calls for innovation.

Speakers also stressed the important role of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) and Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) in strengthening the science-policy interface and finding the best STI solutions to achieve the SDGs. The inter-sessional work of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) should build links to other STI-related forums, and build partnerships with universities and private sector initiatives.

Some suggested that transformative change is required to achieve the SDGs through STI and that, while incremental change in STI is important, the SDGs will not be achieved without a disruptive and radical change. Several cautioned that artificial intelligence (AI) and big data should not lead to new digital divides, but should be used to improve resilience and wellbeing. Some advocated the application of nuclear techniques to not only generate energy, but also improve health and increase food production.

Synergies between modern and indigenous knowledge are important, and interdisciplinary science should incorporate indigenous knowledge more fully. Mobilizing STI to reach those furthest behind requires better identification of people at risk, in order to understand their needs. IT infrastructure can help to increase connectivity and reach isolated areas.

Bottom-up solutions, a strong knowledge base, and translation of research findings into policy actions were all cited as important. Speakers agreed on the important role of women in STI and the need to increase their contributions. STI must also be gender-sensitive and responsive, and consider socio-economic equality.

Recommendations were made to promote traditional knowledge for the SDGs, invest in capacity building, provide open access to information and results for publicly funded projects, support start-ups, invest in education, and strengthen participation of women in STI.

1. *Perspectives of Major Groups and other Stakeholders*

Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) are crucial to the successful implementation, follow-up, and review of the 2030 Agenda. In preparation for the 2018 HLPF, MGoS contributed to review processes at all levels, including at the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development (RFSDs) and through national review mechanisms. At the 2018 HLPF, they made a quarter of all statements and interventions. One session of the HLPF focused on the recommendations of MGoS around the implementation, follow-up, and review process of the 2030 Agenda and surveyed the contributions of MGoS to the overall successful implementation of the Agenda.

The tendency of some Governments and other entities to value “profit above people” was identified as a major obstacle for sustainable development as so many vulnerable groups still remain invisible, have no access to basic services, face structural or economic barriers, or contend with political oppression, including older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples. Speakers highlighted the importance of working with communities; making Member States’ reporting on the SDGs more accountable; and giving space to MGoS to participate in the SDG implementation, follow-up and review process.

Several participants raised the issue of MGoS participation in reviewing implementation of the SDGs, notably in the Voluntary National Reviews. A review of stakeholder engagement modalities during the upcoming HLPF review was suggested. Others called for a more transparent and inclusive VNR process. Local and subnational authorities should also be consulted by national governments in the VNR preparations. The need to ensure participation of multiple stakeholders in Member States’ respective HLPF delegations was also highlighted.

Some participants expressed the commitment to create a strong enabling environment for engagement of stakeholders. The importance of education and raising awareness among civil society organizations was underscored, as well as the need for capacity building, partnerships and bottom-up approaches that facilitate ownerships and action oriented multi-stakeholder approaches. Locally generated scientific knowledge was highlighted as key in informing policies and local authorities as well as for understanding the interlinkages among the SDGs. Several participants pointed to the need for strengthening the statistical capacity for collection of disaggregated data, in particular by ethnicity.

2. Leaving No One Behind: Are we succeeding?

The 2018 HLPF placed a strong focus on leaving no one behind. Two pairs of rapporteurs (Finland and UNDP and Senegal and Executive Secretary of ECLAC) followed the discussions throughout the session to determine how we are faring on this principle and draw policy messages that can benefit policies and strategies for leaving no one behind.

While making progress in key areas, overall, a message of the HLPF was that we fall short of succeeding in leaving no one behind, especially in reaching the poorest of the poor. In some cases, people have been even pushed further behind, due to high and rising inequality, the negative effects of technological advances, climate change, global integration, land degradation, or other factors.

LDCs and LLDCs are particularly far behind. SIDS have been negatively affected by the impact of climate change, especially rising sea levels. With the current pace, it would be difficult for these countries to achieve the SDGs by 2030. For many developing countries, technological leapfrogging is the only way to

catch up to achieve the SDGs and leave no one behind. International cooperation should be coherent and well-coordinated to address the specific needs of vulnerable countries.

Groups frequently identified as vulnerable are those generally identified in the 2030 Agenda, notably women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, and indigenous peoples. But some also included small holder farmers, and people living in countries in conflict and the situation varies depending on the country or region.

There is a need to recognize the human rights and dignity of all people and promote social justice; combat discrimination, prejudice, xenophobia, and exclusion; tackle inequality in all its dimensions; and ensure that benefits of development are equitably shared. While we have clearer understanding of who are left behind and why, deepening our understanding on multiple factors that lead to the situation is critical.

Leaving no one behind should not be rhetoric; it must be accompanied by concrete action plans. Some people are further behind as a result of certain policies, which can be changed. A broad set of integrated policies for social protection combined with economic and fiscal policies conducive to reduce poverty and inequality is necessary to leave no one behind. A whole of society approach needs to be taken by involving all stakeholders, particularly those who are left behind, not only as beneficiaries but also as agents of change.

Significant data gaps remain. 47 per cent of countries have no civil registration and vital statistics systems that provide critical information to identify who are left behind. Only 13 per cent of countries have allocated budgets for gender-disaggregated data. At the same time, use of data by policymakers is limited, leading to low data demand and use. The lack of coordination among donors supporting statistical capacity development is also a challenge. While timely and disaggregated data is crucial, focusing only on the supply side is not sufficient. It is important to address data demand and use so that data can be relevant and actionable. Further investment is necessary to enhance statistical capacities at the national level. An integrated approach should be taken to address multiple dimensions of poverty, inequality and exclusion, and avoid fragmented initiatives at the local level. Structural change is necessary, as a shift towards leaving no one behind requires transformation of deeply rooted issues.

3. Review of progress on selected SDGs

a. SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

The world is not on track to meet SDG 6. Billions of people worldwide lack access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Only 27 per cent of the population in least developed countries has basic hand washing facilities, and 892 million people continue to practice open defecation. Water scarcity is increasing, water quality is decreasing, and water ecosystems are under threat, which all contribute to decreasing water availability. Climate change is increasing the intensity of these trends. In 22 countries, mostly in Northern Africa and Western Asia and in Central and Southern Asia, water stress is above 70 per cent, which indicates a strong probability of future water scarcity. Rural communities and the urban poor, especially in rapidly expanding small towns, are at risk of being left behind.

However, during the HLPF, many countries shared positive examples of how they are adopting sustainable management of their water resources, with several noting the continued need for support from the international community. Participants highlighted the report of the United Nations/World Bank High-Level Panel on Water, which calls for United Nations water meetings at the highest level—a call echoed by

a number of speakers. Good water governance and integrated water resources management are crucial for the achievement of SDG 6. Protection and management of ecosystems that capture, conserve and regulate water flow, especially forests and wetlands is also critical. Integrated cross-sectoral water management must ensure coordination among water-using sectors such as agriculture and energy, ensure equal access, and eliminate inequalities to ensure no one is left behind.

The human right to water and sanitation was emphasized as a way to address inequalities in access to water and sanitation services, which requires enabling policies that allow for participation by all stakeholders at all levels, provide conditions for private sector investment, promote water conservation water use efficiency, protect water rights and regulate pricing to ensure affordability. The role of local governments, local communities and indigenous people in water resources management was emphasized. The private sector could do more to support research on the application and use of technology and innovation (e.g. isotopic technology) to increase water management and water use efficiency. The establishment of a “Blue Fund” was also suggested to provide support for investment in integrated water management.

b. SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

SDG 7 is the world’s first and only global goal on energy, and the Forum undertook the first review of the goal this year. Energy drives the achievement of all other SDGs. Although the world is not currently on track to reach this goal, it is possible to achieve it by 2030, but only if there is deliberate action to reach those furthest behind. Advances in technologies, rapid cost reductions, strategic shifts in policies, new business models and a growing number of best practices are accelerating the transformation of the energy systems in many places and bringing SDG 7 within reach. To leave no one behind, we must capitalize on this momentum to mobilize greater political will and cooperation, together with higher levels of public and private investment in a sustainable energy future.

Although the global population with access to electricity increased from 78 per cent to 87 per cent between 2000 and 2016, around one billion people still lack access, and only 44.8 per cent of people in LDCs currently have access to electricity. Access rates to electricity in rural areas at 76 per cent are much lower than in urban areas at 97 per cent.

Lack of access to clean cooking fuels adversely impacts human health and wellbeing, especially for women and children, who are the main procurers and users of household energy. Nearly three billion people—41 per cent of the global population—currently do not have access to clean cooking energy and technologies, with 2.2 billion still reliant on traditional wood fuels, resulting in four million deaths annually from household pollution. Access to clean, reliable, affordable and safe cooking energy must be made a top priority.

While renewable energy power generation such as solar and wind expanded dramatically, more progress is needed in transport, cooling and heating sectors. Energy efficiency is improving steadily. Yet, it needs to improve 2.7 per cent per year until 2030, to double the global rate of energy efficiency. The pace of transition to renewable energy should be accelerated through scaled-up investments in production, increased access, better efficiency, discontinuing outdated end-use equipment, and lowering prices.

Participants called for the UN system to establish an intergovernmental forum for energy and SDG 7; to strengthen support and facilitation among multilateral agencies and stakeholders, especially for partnerships; and to leverage existing platforms for mobilizing action, such as the UN Decade on

Sustainable Energy for All 2014 – 2024 and the multi-stakeholder SDG 7 Technical Advisory Group. The scientific community was called upon to accelerate joint research in energy technology—especially clean energy generation, transmission and storage.

Speakers encouraged Governments to recognize interlinkages with other SDGs, especially those related to climate change and de-carbonization of energy, poverty eradication, health, economic growth and decent work, and means of implementation. Many also called on them to accelerate the pace of transition to renewable energy; ensure good data quality and availability for policy decision-making and planning, including gender disaggregated data; mainstream gender across the energy value chain and address gender inequalities; prioritize access to clean, safe, reliable and affordable cooking energy; double investment for SDG 7 from the current US\$ 500 billion per year to over US\$ 1 trillion a year; create an enabling environment for private sector investment by undertaking the relevant policy reforms and creating policy frameworks; and utilize bottom-up approaches in the planning and design of renewable energy projects to facilitate participation and empowerment and ensure that no one is left behind.

c. SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Between 2000 and 2014, the number of people living in slums rose from 807 to 883 million. 91 per cent of the urban population breathes unclean air, with 4.2 million deaths from ambient air pollution in 2016. Managing waste also continues to be a challenge. Damage to housing due to natural disasters showed a statistically significant rise between 1990 and 2013. More than half of the built-up areas in cities worldwide are public open spaces, which promote cleaner air and increased walkability. Little progress has been recorded on housing affordability, as for instance 55 per cent of people spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing in Sub-Saharan Africa. 50 million people are injured each year in road accidents, with 1.3 million deaths recorded on an annual level. A majority of these happen in middle and low-income countries, reducing GDP by up to five per cent.

Speakers stressed that local governments are playing a critical role in the implementation of all 17 SDGs, and highlighted municipal policy plans as a useful starting point to foster alignment of urban policy with the SDGs.

Housing is the most significant issue facing cities today; a fundamental shift is necessary towards housing strategies that build on the notion of housing as a human right, and eliminating homelessness needs to be at the core of urban strategies, with particular attention paid to providing strong legal frameworks and regulating private activity in the sector. Achieving the urban goals of the 2030 Agenda will require coordination across different levels of implementation, given the multiplicity of functions raised by SDG 11. Tax evasion and corruption hamper the ability of municipalities to invest in critical public services, as well as housing.

There is a need for consensus on the definition of “urban” and “city” at the global level. Disaggregated data on the city level is critical to measure progress on the SDGs at the urban level. Speakers highlighted that transport and mobility can only be sustainable if they are safe. In the urban space, safety of pedestrians as well as cyclists is a major consideration. The development of mass transit should also represent a pillar of urban strategies with significant potential to advance sustainable urbanisation. To empower women and girls, future cities need to be well lit, well planned and well maintained, using Universal Design principles where women can claim space to participate as active citizens in urban

governance. Strengthening the science-policy interface is critical, as the pace of urbanisation calls for well-informed and evidence-based policies.

Local governments should receive a prominent “seat at the table” in the review of the 2030 Agenda and urban issues need to be fully acknowledged in the VNR process. Adequate housing as a human right must be at the heart of achieving the urban agenda and implementation of SDG 11. Together with decent jobs and access to services, it provides the foundation for inclusiveness and prosperity. Investment in data and information, early warning and disaster reduction is critical to enhance the resilience and sustainability of cities, in the face of increasing extreme weather events and climate change.

d. SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

There is still a large gap in domestic material consumption and material footprint between the developed and developing world, even though the former has not increased either its consumption or footprint since the 2000s. Extraction of raw materials in the developing world is supporting consumption in wealthy countries. By 2018, a total of 108 countries had national policies and initiatives related to sustainable consumption and production (SCP) aiming to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation. Europe was in the lead, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa. 93 per cent of the world’s 250 largest companies are now reporting on non-financial sustainability issues.

Given the complex and multi-sectoral nature of SDG 12, there is a need for demystifying SCP. This can best be done through a paradigm shift rather than incremental change towards holistic systems thinking, fueled by integrated and inclusive institutions and policies. Most participants referred to the need for a full-fledged system reform to promote growth models that respect planetary boundaries and go beyond GDP per capita to encompass human well-being, elimination of inequalities and rebuilding of trust, including through political will and cultural considerations.

Integration of SDG 12 into sustainable development plans, programmes and actions should happen at and across all levels of governance and supply chains—global, regional, national and sub-national, including particularly city-level. Government and the public sector can influence SCP through legislation, regulation, policy and actions while market-based incentives including corporate social responsibility and circular economy can also prove instrumental. Many speakers put equal weight on consumption and production, while some dwelled more on consumption and others on production and new business models including industrial symbiosis. Some also underlined the importance of science, research and development, technology and the digital revolution, and others referred to the need for open access to information and transparency, accountability and SDG alignment in extractive industries.

Actions that mainstream SDG 12 in government policies and strategies and interconnecting policies, ministries and other related governmental and non-governmental institutions seem most propitious. Some highlighted practices such as efficient eco-labeling; others referred to their green development strategies, laws and environmental audits. Still others discussed new strategies on reducing plastics and food waste. Several participants stressed transparent and accountable green public procurement, as well as fair and efficient taxation, including the fighting of tax evasion, as important tools to shape incentives toward SCP. Sustainable tourism and other sub-areas such as marine litter management and fisheries were also touched upon. Education on global citizenship and sustainable development was emphasized, including for both consumers and producers.

All countries referred to the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement and the need to include women, ethnic minorities, elderly people, people with disabilities, and indigenous peoples. A few put specific emphasis on youth and its potential for fostering SCP. Some added that leaving no one behind also refers to the private sector, as businesses cannot afford to ignore the need for SCP.

Governments were recommended to establish a regulatory framework that supports a SCP transformation, engage actors at all levels, prioritize education, advocacy and outreach, and encouraged to take the lead in the SCP transformation through sustainable public procurement practices. Easy, comprehensive and integrated SCP and circular economy standards should be formulated, including as part of a general effort to demystify and operationalize SDG 12 at national levels. Motivating and facilitating a shift in consumer behaviour to promote sustainable lifestyles is critical to achieve an SCP transformation at scale, and consumers must be empowered to understand the differential impact of their choices.

e. SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Although protected areas and forests under long-term management plans increased and the rate of forest loss decreased, forests continue to be lost at an alarmingly high rate of 3.3 million hectares annually, and land productivity continues to show declining trends. Similarly, the average proportion of important sites for biodiversity covered by protected areas continues to increase, yet biodiversity continues to be lost at an accelerated rate, largely due to human activities.

Since 2010, the percentage of countries that have enacted national legislation relevant to the prevention and management of invasive alien species has increased by 19 per cent. Bilateral ODA in support of biodiversity is USD7 billion, decreasing by 21 per cent from 2015 to 2016. No data are available on domestic public investment, private domestic or international investment in biodiversity.

Participants called for urgent action to accelerate progress towards the achievement of SDG15 targets, particularly those with 2020 deadlines, such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Some stressed the importance of integrated landscape approaches to sustainably manage and safeguard forests, wetlands, and other terrestrial ecosystems, taking into account the land-food-water-energy-climate nexus, urban-rural linkages, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Many speakers expressed their increased understanding of how progress could be leveraged through addressing the many interlinkages among the SDGs, focusing on areas of critical trade-offs.

Several speakers called attention to the sharp decline of wetlands and peatlands, and the need to promote integrated approaches for sustainable management of watersheds and other water-related ecosystem services. Land degradation neutrality was discussed as an accelerator to restore the productivity of degraded land and improve livelihoods, with calls for capacity building and the application of science and technology in this area. The importance of transformational actions on forests through the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests and its Global Forest Goals and targets was also mentioned.

Recalling the principles of inclusion, interdependence and leaving no one behind, many participants stressed the need to ensure that custodians of terrestrial ecosystems were not forgotten in the implementation of SDG 15, and stressed the need to empower rural women, respect the rights and

knowledge of indigenous peoples, and engage youth and other excluded or marginalized groups in the context of policy planning and implementation, to increase the sustainable management of resources and ensure sustainable livelihoods.

Governments were called upon to better monitor, assess and report on the progress made on the integration of ecosystem and biodiversity values into national planning and development strategies, and make ambitious commitments for a post-2020 Biodiversity Strategy at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2020. Some participants recommended accelerated actions to support policy implementation through increased public and private finance and investment, citing examples of sustainable land bonds, REDD+ and other payments for ecosystem services, National REDD Funds, National Forest Development Funds, Adaptation of African Agriculture, and deforestation-free commodities. Multilateral and bilateral financial institutions and mechanisms were asked to provide increased support for investments in rural areas that involve small-scale producers and support their transition to sustainable agricultural practices.

f. SDG 17: Means of implementation

In 2017, net ODA from OECD member countries totalled \$146.6 billion, which represents a decrease of 0.6 per cent from 2016 level in real terms, mainly driven by lower costs for refugee assistance in donor countries. ODA as a share of donors' gross national income (GNI) remained low at 0.31 per cent. Only five DAC countries – Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom – met or exceeded the United Nations benchmark for ODA contributions of at least 0.7 per cent of GNI. Remittances sent by international migrants to their home countries in the form of personal transfers and compensation of employees have declined to \$538 billion (0.72 per cent of global GDP) in 2016, from \$555 billion in 2015. Debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services has been on the rise for five consecutive years in LDCs – from a low of 3.5 per cent in 2011 to 8.6 per cent in 2016. Gaps in high-speed Internet access continue to be striking and represent a challenge for advancement of sustainable development. LDCs share of world merchandise exports fell between 2013 and 2016 after a long period of increase. Gaps in statistical capacity continue to be a challenge. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, have formulated national statistical plans but only three of them are fully funded.

The outcome document adopted by the 2018 ECOSOC Financing for Development Follow-up Forum (FfD Forum) was reported to be actionable and forward-looking. It acknowledges that despite the general global economic upturn, the world economy remains vulnerable to financial and economic volatility, and important implementation gaps still exist, restraining progress towards achieving the SDGs. On systemic issues, the 2018 Global Financing for Sustainable Development Report recognized that better ex-ante risk management instruments are required. As disasters cross borders, more efficient risk diversification needs to be advanced; however, budgetary constraints may impede countries from paying for the premiums for these instruments. References to the Paris Agreement include specific calls for increased investing in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and investment in sustainable infrastructure is currently grossly inadequate. The decline in banking relationships was also highlighted as a major concern.

The ecosystem for financing for sustainable development needs to be better aligned with the SDGs. The UN could bring together different key actors in finance to work towards improving an ecosystem that generates new resources for sustainable development, and ensuring that all investments are better aligned with the SDGs and more long-term oriented. Strengthening standards, as well as transparency and accountability, are key issues for delivering in this area.

It was suggested that a global forum for development banks could be established, to initiate policy dialogue, exchange experiences and promote best practices among all the development banks, facilitating their constructive roles in financing for the realization of the SDGs.

New technologies should be used to promote economic growth, but more efforts should be made to focus on protection of the most vulnerable. In order to address the possible negative impacts of new technologies, governments should adopt policies to reform education and skills development systems so that the jobs created by technologies can be availed and shared broadly. Improved frameworks are needed for investments and social protection. At the same time, privacy and data protection and financial stability require greater attention.

Gender equality should be central to efforts towards improving access to finance, technology, public services and job opportunities. Policy design processes should aim to facilitate gender equality based on a legal framework. Data monitoring and accountability are crucial components of SDG 17. In many areas and countries, there is not enough data or the right data to inform the understanding of the development status, which hinders the design and delivery of good policies. Investing in statistics should be one of priorities in achieving the SDGs. Part of ODA should specifically go into this area.

4. Voluntary National Reviews

During the Ministerial Segment, 46 countries presented their Voluntary National Review (VNR): Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Niger, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Uruguay, and Vietnam. This year, Colombia, Egypt and Mexico presented their second VNR, while Togo conducted its VNR for the third year in a row. Some countries stated their commitment to conduct VNRs in the future.

The VNR presentations took stock of national actions, achievements and challenges, and identified next steps in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Many reported that the SDGs have widespread support at the highest levels of government, and across the political spectrum, even after changes of governments. All countries provided detailed accounts of steps taken to integrate the 2030 Agenda into their national policy frameworks. Many countries stated that arrangements such as inter-ministerial committees on the SDGs now provide coordination and leadership, drawing also on stakeholders from outside the government. Domestic implementation and partnerships are often based on a whole-of-government approach; while a whole-of-society approach fosters stakeholder engagement and raises awareness on actions for implementation.

In several countries, technical bodies support high-level institutions and committees, and national statistical offices are members of the coordinating institutions or provide them with technical support. To promote ownership within government, some countries have appointed SDG focal points in line ministries and established SDG units to ensure effective coordination across departments and agencies. Institutions established and adapted at municipal levels provide evidence that implementation is also taking place sub-nationally.

A variety of planning frameworks now exist. However, many noted that harmonization of national strategies and plans is a continuous process that needs to be implemented in all sectors, and involves mapping the existing policies and programmes against each of the SDG targets. While many countries noted that the broad framework of their existing strategies was flexible enough to encompass the SDGs, and were working toward integrating the SDGs into sectoral policies and investment plans, they also stressed that ensuring a whole-of-government approach requires adequate financing and a robust institutional framework involving key stakeholders, who must be involved in preparing and validating national strategies and plans.

Building on existing national development strategies also requires a “step change” in the integration of social, economic and environmental policies, to properly localize the 2030 Agenda. Key priority areas for integration include strengthening actions around the SDGs at the sub-national level and enhancing the monitoring and evaluation infrastructure for tracking progress towards their achievement at the national and sub-national levels. Some countries noted their national plans and strategies were also aligned with regional frameworks, such as the African Union’s Agenda 2063 or with action plans for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

The VNRs present evidence that the private sector and civil society are considered essential actors in the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Broad stakeholder engagement is becoming an established part of policymaking processes, and many countries are capitalizing on positive synergies among government efforts, private sector efforts and civil society efforts to achieve the SDGs. Synergies among various stakeholders are important, as this forms the foundation of an enabling environment for partnerships. There is broad recognition that innovative, multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda, as well as for mobilizing additional sources of capital to support their efforts. Many countries reported that governments, organizations, and individuals are already answering the 2030 Agenda’s call to action and convening new partnerships to respond in new ways to collective challenges.

The range of consultations and inputs that contributed to the preparation of the VNRs often included discussions with civil society groups, representatives of business, members of parliament, city and regional associations, women's groups, youth organizations, scientists and researchers. Increasing multi-stakeholder engagement for the 2030 Agenda is regarded as a key component of the VNR process. Public consultations have been launched on the Internet, accompanied by awareness and information campaigns as well as workshops. A participatory approach to the preparation of the VNR itself is emerging, with organizations representing various stakeholder groups involved even from the drafting stage.

Many countries noted that universities, businesses and civil society are making substantial efforts to raise awareness, form partnerships and address the risks and opportunities inherent in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Companies can provide information on their contributions to the SDGs, complementing official information. Outreach is being undertaken in many countries to engage business associations and councils of higher educational institutions, with advocacy campaigns to initiate and inform stakeholder engagement. Communication strategies are targeting certain stakeholders that are not traditionally part of more established mechanisms, and special efforts are being made to reach out to youth, for instance through the appointment of a Minister of State for Youth Affairs and the establishment of youth councils, with involvement in official deliberations concerning the implementation of the SDGs. The need to strengthen the involvement of local media and national parliaments in monitoring the implementation of the SDGs was recognized.

Countries facing very different national circumstances have clearly stated their commitment to leaving no one behind, outlining how they are identifying those at risk and what policy measures are being put in place. Indigenous peoples, women, youth, the elderly, the LGBTQ community, migrants, and persons with disabilities are more likely to face poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion. Strengthening the resilience of vulnerable groups and communities can be a key element of the implementation framework of the SDGs through countries' national development plans.

Gender is a common crosscutting element in the analysis of leaving no one behind, and there are different challenges for both women and men; women's empowerment and social inclusion were identified as especially important to building resilient societies, and in some areas are manifesting through legal provisions such as constitutional guarantees of gender equality, as well as policies to ensure equal opportunities. Reference was also made to programmes for migrant workers that safeguard their rights, provide health insurance and shelter, protect against arbitrary dismissal, and combat human trafficking.

Measures taken to ensure that no one is left behind include scaling up social protection programmes and improving their targeting mechanisms. State reform can reduce inequalities and regional asymmetries by allocating more resources to more deprived areas, to provide better quality of public services and infrastructure. In this context, decentralization was seen to contribute toward ensuring that no one is left behind and the achievement of the SDGs on a local level.

The VNRs also reported on goals of particular importance for each country, including quality education; peace, justice, and strong institutions; gender equality in the spheres of education, political representation, and land rights; innovative energy solutions as the basis of a modern and sustainable economy; the shift towards a low-carbon circular economy and improvement in waste reduction, reuse and recycle for creating new jobs and increasing resource efficiency. Policies to increase the share of renewable energy were highlighted by many countries.

Commitment to the global partnership for sustainable development was heard from donor countries, who referred to their priorities of development assistance including infrastructure, fisheries and water, effective governance, education and health, building resilience, and gender equality. Steps are being taken that will further strengthen the alignment of development assistance with the SDGs. Many countries are undertaking efforts to strengthen their partnership with the international community, including through reform of local aid coordination structures to improve the alignment of donor aid with national priorities. Reference was made to the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), and its significance for countries in conflict and fragility. Promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls was often cited as the most effective way to drive progress on all SDGs.

Effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda is contingent on the availability of adequate and timely resources, and many countries are exploring both domestic and external financing mechanisms. A financing needs assessment was recognized as a means to develop a resource mobilization strategy for the effective implementation of the SDGs, with countries planning or having undertaken such assessments. Countries are broadening their tax base and improving the enabling environment for investment.

Presentations revealed that there continues to be a limited institutional and financial capacity to effectively monitor and implement the SDGs, and the need to mobilize financial resources for reinforcing statistical capacities for the implementation of the SDGs was continually highlighted. The Forum was urged to collaborate with SIDS and middle-income countries in accessing financing, using new

mechanisms and partnerships that encourage greater public and private financial participation in these economies and the use of methodologies and indicators that go beyond economic growth. Continued support by development partners was important and valued, especially considering the potential graduation of some countries from LDC status.

This year's VNRs also presented a clear picture of the most pressing challenges. Mitigating climate change impacts on water, energy, agriculture, biodiversity, and coastal resources affects almost all countries. Ensuring equitable, universal and sustainable access to energy, water and sanitation and other basic services remains elusive, due in part to growing populations in some countries, with an associated demand for services, as well as an aging demographic in others. Overcoming these challenges will require substantial and sustained commitment and cooperation from Governments and all relevant stakeholders. Improved statistical capacity will be a prerequisite for collection and analysis of the timely, reliable and disaggregated data necessary to support effective policy and decision making to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

In the ensuing discussions and Q&A sessions after each of 46 VNR presentations, including both countries and stakeholders, recommendations included, inter alia, the following:

- Putting strategies and policies in place to decentralize and localize the implementation of the 2030 Agenda including through targeted capacity building of local and sub-national governments and improving both vertical and horizontal coordination;
- Identifying focal points in each line/sectoral ministry for the 2030 Agenda and implementation of SDGs in order to ensure the whole-of-government approach;
- Improving policy coherence and building capacity in policy integration and the use of goal-oriented, evidence-based, and participatory frameworks to formulate, implement and review policies and strategies for sustainable development;
- Aligning the budget with the implementation requirements based on evidence-based monitoring and evaluation in order to identify long- and medium-term strategic investments;
- Investing in statistical offices and their capacity to produce high quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data to be able to deliver evidence-based statistics to increase transparency and improve the public service and SDG delivery;
- Strengthening evaluation and monitoring is encouraged through targeted capacity building in order to increase accountability to their citizens and show evidence-based progress;
- Putting in place measures based on trends and evidence to achieve economic growth, while at the same time creating enabling environment for social and environmental resilience, reducing indebtedness including through swaps and achieving harmonization between the implementation of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement to combat negative impacts of climate change and natural disasters;
- Putting measures in place to achieve decent jobs and encouraging women and youth to participate in the formal economy and labor market including through development of human capital needed for such participation;
- Establishing various multistakeholder partnerships to strengthen engagement of all stakeholders, but at the same time ensure their support in a more institutionalized way.