

**CLIMATE & SDGS
SYNERGY CONFERENCE****Virtual Engagement
2020*****Introduction- the world in 2020***

The COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis for humanity. Travel restrictions and social distancing, adopted to stem the spread of the novel corona virus, have shuttered much economic activity. Even as rates of transmission fall in certain countries and cities, others report rising trends, total numbers of deaths continue to increase, unemployment is soaring, billions of livelihoods are in jeopardy and a global economic recession is imminent. Continuing anxiety and uncertainty cloud prospects for the future.

At the same time, many governments are rolling out stimulus packages on a monumental scale and planning for recovery. There is a new appreciation of the urgent need to prepare for global crises. Millions are adapting to working and learning remotely. Against this backdrop of uncertainty and rapid change, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement can serve as a compass to help policy makers meet urgent needs while aligning short-term solutions to medium and long-term climate and sustainable development objectives.

Looking ahead

Even before COVID-19 upended plans, the year 2020 was meant to be a landmark year for climate action and the SDGs. Following the SDG Summit in 2019, the United Nations launched a 'Decade of Action and Delivery' to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, while governments prepared to submit updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), enhancing their climate ambitions under the Paris Agreement.

The pandemic re-emphasizes the absolute necessity of continuing to harness synergies across both SDG implementation and climate action. Global temperatures continue to rise: the world is now 1.1°C warmer than pre-industrial levels, perilously close to breaching the 1.5°C aspiration. SDG progress was already insufficient across multiple goals and targets – new projections are even gloomier, estimating increases in hunger and poverty.

As countries chart their way out of the crisis, their first priority will be restoring the well-being of their people - anchoring plans to make the most of the synergies between SDGs and climate can produce immediate benefits, as well as accelerating the transition to sustainable, de-carbonised economies and resilient, inclusive societies. Not doing so, on the other hand, risks locking economies and societies back into unsustainable pathways.

Stimulus packages and recovery plans that emphasize investments in social protection, public services, and low-carbon energy, food and transport systems can deliver both immediate and long-term social, economic and environmental co-benefits. They can foster job creation in care work and other low-

carbon sectors, help achieve the SDGs and put the world on a climate-safe path. Private sector and multi-lateral financial institutions can incorporate climate action in their investment plans directing resources towards clean power, battery storage, and carbon capture technology. Poorer countries can be supported to leap-frog away from traditional ‘grow-first-clean-up-later’ pathways. Working in concert, governments can pave the way for a more sustainable financing of global public goods, including pandemic prevention and climate/disaster resilience.

Such changes will need to counter pressures to return to ‘business-as-usual’, but the pandemic itself is promoting greater awareness of the deep interlinkages across sectors and countries; and between humans and nature. Changes in individual behavior and consumption patterns, along with greater feelings of solidarity and inter-generational awareness can support the necessary transitions. Stakeholders from different domains – including experts, practitioners, policy makers, scientists, businesses, young people - can play a critical role, working in collaboration to bring these perspectives to bear in helping countries and communities recover better and stronger from the pandemic.

Global synergies conferences

In April 2019, UN DESA and UN Climate Change (UNFCCC secretariat), organised the first annual Global Conference on Strengthening Synergies between the Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda. Hosted by the Government of Denmark, it took place in Copenhagen with several hundred participants from diverse communities.

The success of the first conference, including its follow-up during the CoP 25 in Madrid led to a decision to make this an annual event. The pandemic, however, forced a change in plans for 2020. Rather than an in-person conference, a virtual Global Synergies Consultation will take place over the course of May and June. The objective, however, remains the same, but is marked with greater urgency.

We seek to advance the application of synergies in practice by illustrating the potential of synergistic approaches to recover better & faster from Covid-19, accelerate enhanced climate action and transitions to sustainable development. In the words of the UN Secretary-General, the “recovery must not come on the backs of the poorest – and we cannot create a legion of new poor. Working in concert, countries can draw on synergies to steer recovery to a more sustainable and inclusive path. The Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda give us a framework that can drive global recovery and enable us to keep our promises to people & planet.” All stakeholders and partners are invited to join.

Objectives of the 2020 Synergies Consultations

- Take stock of advances in knowledge and practice in implementing synergies at all levels;
- Explore how to maximize SDG & climate co-benefits in Covid-19 recovery measures;
- Identify concrete examples that illustrate the potential of synergistic approaches to recover better & stronger from Covid-19 and achieve 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement objectives;
- Ascertain ways in which updated National Determined Contributions in 2021 can contribute to Covid-19 recovery & integrate SDG co-benefits;
- Contribute substantive inputs to benchmark global platforms such as the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF), the SDG Decade of Action and UNFCCC/COPs.

Outcomes

1. An action-focused final Report to serve as input for the 2020 High-Level Political Forum, the SDG Decade of Action, UNFCCC/COP26 and other global fora;
2. A Compilation of Synergies in Action drawn from case studies & initiatives;
3. Continued virtual exchange and engagement among the synergies community, including to support multi-disciplinary approaches to recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Participation

Technical experts from governments and international organisations; businesses; academia and other stakeholders covering a variety of SDGs and climate action.

Schedule of Engagements

Questionnaire on Synergies in Action¹ - All stakeholders invited to contribute their perspectives, initiatives & experiences, applying synergies in practice.

Thurs 28 May, 9-11:30AM (NY time) – Webinar 1 of 3, Thinking Ahead for a Sustainable, Just & Resilient Recovery

Thurs 11 June, 10-Noon (NY) – Webinar 2 of 3, Synergies for Just Transitions & Economic Recovery

Thurs, 25 June, 9-11AM (NY) – Webinar 3 of 3, Going forward with Climate & SDG Synergies

7 - 17 July – UN High Level Political Forum

2021, Dates TBA: UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 26)

Resources

UN Climate and SDGs Synergies Knowledge Platform - Synergies questionnaire and webinar resources: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/climate-sdgs-synergies2019#home>

UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2019, “The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development”:

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf

UN Report, “Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of Covid-19”, Chart on p. 12 summarizes impacts on different SDGs

<https://unsdg.un.org/resources/shared-responsibility-global-solidarity-responding-socio-economic-impacts-covid-19>

Report of the UN Secretary General on the 2019 Climate Action Summit and the Way Forward in 2020:

https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/assets/pdf/cas_report_11_dec.pdf

¹ Responses will form the basis for drafting the 2020 *Global Synergies Consultations Report & Compilation of Synergies in Action*, to serve as input to the HLPF, SDG Decade of Action, UNFCCC COP26 & other UN conferences.