

United Nations
High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, July 2020
Preparatory process

Session: Protecting the planet and building resilience

Pursuing policies, investments and innovation to address disaster risk reduction and protect the planet from degradation

INPUTS FROM UNICEF

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda is rooted in the idea that human development and wellbeing cannot be achieved without simultaneously safeguarding and investing in nature and managing disaster risk in a systemic manner—otherwise development gains will be short lived and unequally distributed. Biodiversity loss, land and forest degradation, climate change, and disasters are threatening progress toward sustainable development. Actions to advance economic and social development need to address these threats and build resilience including through nature-based solutions, sustainable consumption and production practices and accounting for the true value of nature.

The past decade—in particular the COVID-19 crisis—has revealed the systemic nature of risk and the cascading impact of disasters across all three dimensions of sustainable development. The natural environment is humanity’s first line of defense against many hazards, and nature-based solutions must be scaled up to manage disaster risks, build resilience and leave no one behind. These issues are addressed directly in SDGs 12, 13, 14, and 15, but they are foundational to the entire 2030 Agenda, including poverty eradication, health, food security and inclusive economic growth and sustainable livelihoods. The current session will highlight opportunities and innovations that can build resilience and manage risk while securing livelihoods and safeguarding the planet.

Guiding questions

Please consider the 4 questions below and submit written responses totaling **2000 words or less**. (Though the average should be 500 words per question, it is fine to use more words on one question and fewer on another, to total 2000.) Please draw from your field of expertise and experience and be as concrete and tangible as possible. Please provide your responses in a Word document by **12 May** to rambler@un.org.

1. Systems transformation

What are the fundamental systems transformations needed to halt nature degradation, reverse loss and manage risk, while eradicating poverty, ensuring food security for a growing population, securing livelihoods and promoting resilience?

System transformation should include a combination of the following tenets:

Make children the centre of systems transformation, including national plans and policies that guide it. Children are the most marginalized and vulnerable – and their very survival and potential is determined by a healthy environment, good nutrition, livelihoods and ultimately resilience. Moreover, they have the right to be engaged in these processes, as articulated in the

Convention on the Rights of the Child. Climate resilience and environmental sustainability should be a core element of services that children depend upon for their survival and well-being.

Ensure interventions and programming are risk-informed, account for volatility, reduce risk and build resilience. Resilience should be built into development efforts that are also calibrated to a changing climate and consistent and adhere to a right-based approach. Assessments of the variety and heterogeneity of risks will be necessary to ensure interventions and programming are risk-informed and account for volatility. This includes understanding and addressing how natural systems interact with social, economic and political processes. Services such as water/sanitation, health, and education will be increasingly pressured as a result of climate-related weather events and increasing pollution. Ensuring that these services can continue to function without disruption are central to protecting children in the face of a changing climate and environment. Sector development strategies, budgets, infrastructure and capacity development should include climate resilience and environmental sustainability as a core element.

Monitor and communicate risk effectively. This includes strengthened climate information services and capacities of national and local entities; multi-hazard early warning systems that reach the last mile and hardest-to reach and marginalized communities; air/water/soil quality monitoring systems adequately supported and maintained—both for public exposure and private sector obligations and enforcement. Communicating risk correctly is critical for uptake, and this goes beyond just preparedness and into behavioural change for reducing the risk before it becomes an issue. Young people are often the most tuned-in to multiple layers of risk communication (online, mobile phones, school curricula, etc) and can be excellent vectors and influencers for spreading good practices; child centered risk assessments / evidence that can influence sectoral plans and national / subnational plans.

Manage residual risk by creating inclusive and effective coping mechanisms. This includes safety nets / shock responsive social protection (including but not limited to insurance schemes); flexible financing mechanisms that can both serve as contingency funds while also building resilience; resilience built into humanitarian efforts post-disaster to build back better and greener and to certainly at the very least “do no harm”.

Focus on the poorest and most marginalized children. In any form of system transformation, focusing on the most marginalized and vulnerable children will be essential to ensure the system functions properly. The most marginalized children and young people bear the biggest brunt of impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.

Recognize children and young people as agents of change. We need a paradigm shift in our economic development model to provide opportunities for future generations without destroying our natural environment. This will require drastic changes in individual behaviour, regulations, and business practices. Rather than passive victims, children should be recognized as the clients of tomorrow’s solutions – their concerns and ideas need to be heard, political space for them created and economic opportunities linked to environmental sustainability made the new normal.

2. *Specific actions to drive transformation*

Please describe 2-3 specific, promising actions at different levels that can drive these systems transformations. These actions could relate for instance to scaling up the use of nature-based solutions, sustainable consumption and production, or other approaches. How have these actions helped (or how could they help) break down siloes, support the systemic management of risk, and trigger positive changes in society? How can co-benefits between actions be maximized and the risk in trade-offs stemming from these actions (i.e. negative impacts on other aspects of the 2030 Agenda) managed?

Specific actions to drive transformation include the following:

Early warning/ early action systems and evidence generation. This will be crucial to drive transformation, helping to make systems responsive to the evolving and often volatile and erratic nature of risks. Evidence on impacts of children will be needed to direct systems transformation in the right ways. Child-centered risk assessments / climate vulnerability assessments / other concrete evidence creation to inform decision-making at national and subnational levels for specific sectors and for cross sectoral policies and plans (including national climate change plans, NDCs, NAPs, etc.)

Partnerships with the private sector. The private sector has an important role to play in creating an environment fit for children. In addition to ensuring business practices respect the rights and needs of children and young people (as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as Child Rights and Business Principles), the private sector has considerable resources, scope for innovation, as well as expertise that can be harnessed towards solutions that create shared-value, a better economy and a better world for children and young people. Moreover, the private sector can also create opportunities for youth entrepreneurship and markets for a green economy transition.

Localisation. Subnational level climate-calibrated disaster management plans, state/township education improvement plans, state health plans (among other localised and decentralised plans and processes) will help to drive transformation in meaningful and tangible ways that not only affect children and young people's lives, but also engage them in the process. There remains a significant gap between the existence of national policies and plans and action on the ground to reach the last mile and "every child." Subnational plans are critical.

Child and Youth advocacy and activism will help to ensure that their rights are protected and policymakers held to account. This includes influencing and engagement in national and subnational policies and plans on climate change. National climate change plans, including NDCs and NAPs, should include the meaningful engagement of children and young people – to both inform the scope and depth of the plans, as well as part of the implementation process.

3. ***Means of implementation and the global partnership for development (SDG 17):***

Achieving the 2030 Agenda relies on a combination of means of implementation to catalyse action and engagement, harness synergies and reduce trade-offs. Please discuss the means of implementation, including finance, partnerships, and capacity building, needed to make the necessary transformations. How can science, technology and innovation (STI), including social innovation and local and indigenous knowledge, be mobilized to advance these transformations?

National and subnational public investment in risk reduction and climate-proofing the SDGs needs to be scaled up in proportion to the urgency of the crisis, and this should be consistent across development sectors. Climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters cannot be seen as add-ons, but central to advancing sustainable development in all sectors.

Partnerships for green economy transition and youth entrepreneurship. This represents a tremendous opportunity in countries making a rapid transition to choose sustainable options that are also economically beneficial. Youth skills development for eco/green solutions can ensure national / local retention of innovations. Facilitating partnerships between local universities and private sector companies can be a concrete means of implementation in this area, for example, along with piloting promising initiatives and products for scale-up and cross fertilization among countries. Business models and market assessments are needed to ensure the trade-offs are properly accounted for and ideally make the investment case for green solutions.

Local and indigenous knowledge are absolutely invaluable in creating solutions that are better for our planet in the long-term and should be piloted and evaluated for scale up and value chains that can support resilient and diverse livelihoods of local populations. Local level risk governance has proven to be one of the most effective means for advancing the resilience agenda, and so the subnational and local levels need support in calibrating their plans to a changing climate, environmental and ongoing disaster risks.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) will continue to shift from traditional grants and loans that have often been siloed and do not provide building blocks for progress beyond the end date of a specific project. ODA is already shifting toward catalytic investment programmes that build the foundation for sustainable progress that is based on national priorities and strategic pipelines that eliminate duplication and incorporate the comparative advantages of various partners coming together to align incentives and create shared value.

Build back better/ greener. Catalysing progress will also require that during a disaster event, including the current COVID-19 crisis, actions to respond do not harm the existing progress and instead serve to build back better / greener. In a limited resource world, we cannot afford to miss these crucial opportunities to address the humanitarian-development nexus. Donors are increasingly aware of the need for flexible financing that contributes overall to greater resilience.

4. Covid-19 crisis

What does the Covid-19 crisis reveal about the human-nature relationship and systemic risk creation? How can nature-based solutions contribute to a post-COVID-19 economic and social recovery that is more sustainable, equitable and resilient? What immediate and medium-term steps are needed to ensure that the post-COVID-19 economic and social recovery is sustainable, equitable and resilient. How can we redirect financial flows and direct recovery efforts to create better outcomes for people, prosperity and planet?

COVID may not have been directly caused by climate change, but there are strong parallels and linkages. Firstly, environmental degradation is a major underlying risk factor associated with the spread of infectious diseases. The continuous exploitation of natural resources and encroachment on natural habitats exposes humans to more unknown pathogens. Secondly, the

lack of a safe and clean environment for children is a major risk factor – not just for children, but for everyone. The COVID crisis is particularly dangerous for those who live in polluted environments with little access to clean drinking water, basic sanitation and hygiene. Thirdly, this crisis gives us a glimpse of what could be in store in the future. Studies show that climate change will increase the number and frequencies of emergencies in the form of natural disasters, pandemics, conflict, and migration. We're only just starting to see the damage that a major shock can do to our economies, our societies, and our personal lives. It will be the poorest countries (many of whom are already facing the greatest pressures from climate change) that will be the least able to cope.

We need to grow back green, grow back together, and link COVID recovery and response to climate and environmental action. We can rebuild our economies in the wake of the virus, to make them more equitable, resilient, and sustainable. Following are some concrete examples of what we can do to achieve this:

We need to build resilience and disaster preparedness directly into our programmes. Climate-smart health and education systems are more resilient not just to climate change, but to all sorts of crises – including pandemics, but also subsequent economic crises. For example, renewable energy can improve self-reliance of schools and health clinics, minimizing the effects of disruptions in traditional systems and infrastructure. Resilient social protection systems are better able to manage the impacts of the variety of shocks, from climate change and natural disasters, to epidemics and economic shocks.

We need to strengthen access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene – a crucial mechanism to prevent the further spread of COVID. Some 2.2 billion people around the world do not have safely managed drinking water services, 4.2 billion people do not have safely managed sanitation services, and 3 billion lack basic handwashing facilities with soap and water at home (three quarters of the population in Least Developed Countries did not have basic handwashing facilities).

Efforts should be taken to ensure that all children are equipped with the resources, including remote learning and technology, to continue their education, even if they are not physically at school. Hundreds of millions of children are deprived of their education due to COVID – a good education is one of the most valuable resources we can provide children in the fight against climate change. Up to 91% of the world's student population are being affected by nationwide school closures, many of whom, especially the poorest, are not able to engage in remote learning. Education provides children with the skills, resources and abilities to harness their strengths, their creativity and their desire to create a better, more sustainable world around them and for their communities.

We need to strengthen health systems so that they address environmental risks. A systems approach should account for the variety of factors and determinants of children's health, survival and wellbeing. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have a right to a healthy environment, yet according to the World Health Organization environmental risks account for 1 out of 4 child deaths. Children are particularly vulnerable to many forms of environmental pollution – they breathe and consume more air, water and food per unit of body weight than adults. Toxins are particularly deleterious, as they can inhibit the growth and functioning of vital organs that affect them well into adulthood. Health systems should be

geared to addressing these more proximate risk factors – not just the direct impacts. This requires, but is not limited to, improved communication for behaviour change within communities, so that people understand better how to prevent diseases, infection and risks to their health rather than only treat it. It means identifying interlinkages between risk factors, including social ones, to create a better enabling environment for the overall health of not just individuals, but whole communities.

- **Harnessing the opportunity for intergenerational solidarity:** the physical/health risks that the COVID crisis presents to older generations are markedly higher than it presents to younger generations. However, physical distancing for preventing the spread of the virus only works **when all people opt into a social contract** – including people who are less at risk of becoming seriously ill if they contract the virus, such as young people. And by the same token, the risks that the climate crisis presents to younger generations are markedly higher than it presents to older generations. Yet stopping climate change requires actions by older generations who sit in institutions and positions of power. We are at a unique moment for intergenerational solidarity – where we might be able to bring together people to **consider how their individual actions and behaviors affect others and harness the energy to tackle some of the greatest existential threats all-of-society is facing, including that of climate change.**