

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

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, drought, dust /sand storm, 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, and Agenda 2063, 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?

In reducing risks of nature degradation, lies a delicate balance between land use and planning and meeting the growing needs of a growing population. During my school days, I was confronted with a question to write an essay on the probability that unregulated population grows and wanton destruction of nature will someday lead to complete depletion of raw materials in our planet. Before attempting the question, fear confronted me and I paused - imagining a world where the land will not be adequate to accommodate growing population, leave alone enough land for food production and nature conservation. As years pass by while advancing my career in disaster risk reduction/management, that fear is becoming real. That is the nature of risk, ‘risk is not real, it is becoming real– it is always an event

that is threatening but ceases to be real when it becomes a catastrophe or a crisis¹. Nature degradation is real and therefore it is an active catastrophe. Acting like if it is a risk will be misleading and counterproductive, thus undermining actions required to halt and reverse the degradation.

Managing risks, halting and reversing nature degradation, securing livelihoods and promoting resilience of a growing population; require a holistic approach that imbeds all sustainable development solutions – Sustainable Development Goals, land management and restoration, disaster reduction approaches, and climate change mitigating and adaptation are the fundamental systems needed to address current quagmire challenging the earth.

The challenges we face today are not lack of solutions – they are as a result of the adoption of silos approaches where there are myriads of conventions and frameworks that do not speak to each other. These do not only duplicate efforts but undermine successful implementation of the frameworks that are meant to address the challenges facing the planet. For example the three Rio conventions (CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD) whose aims were to promote a sustainable planet for next generations, do not speak to each other. It is unimaginable to think that any sustainable solutions can be found when CBD is doing its own thing, UNFCCC and UNCCD are going different direction. Similarly it is inconceivable to believe the difference between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation – both mean the same thing with exception that disaster risk reduction covers other hazards including climate related hazards. This is unnecessary duplication and unwanted innovation. Innovating naming of things that mean the same is a bigger challenge facing coordinated implementation of different solutions that aim to protect the planet and secure resilience of generations.

There is a need for transformation. These should include:

a) Institutional Changes and restructuring

There is a need to merge some of these frameworks and conventions, with clear roles and responsibilities designated to relevant thematic areas. Just as the United Nations merged different UN agencies under UN WOMEN, other UN organs, regional organizations and member states should take this lesson to initiate institutional changes to address the silos and make best use of available meagre resources. Using agreed criteria, those addressing similar objectives can be merged. In recent years, term like resilience have dominated the scene to the extent that the term is believed to have been abused. The key questions that usually comes to my mind when it comes to resilience is ‘resilience to what’? Is climate change a disaster risk? Someone would say it is an existential threat but how is existential threat different from disaster risk? Is land degradation a disaster risk? If you are building resilience to climate change, what about natural climate variability? If Carbon emission is today reduced to negligible level, will there be no droughts, floods, cyclones, thunderstorms and among others? There is a need to rethink and stop fragmentations of one thing to mean different things – that is not innovation, it is disorganization and disharmony.

b) Embracing friendly and locally developed technologies and nature based solutions

Some countries have become graveyards of technologies developed somewhere else. The poor countries are grabbing with waste disposable that have significant effects on the environment. While some technologies can be transferred the same is true with helping those countries to develop local environment friendly technologies and approaches. For example using solar powered irrigations systems can provide sustainable solutions than fossil fuel. Recent IPCC report on Climate Change and land²

¹ Ulrich Beck: Living in world risk society 2006.

indicates that land use and changes to land use, driven largely by commercial agricultural expansion, forestry, and consumption patterns, have not only contributed to food availability for a growing population, but also to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, loss of natural ecosystems and declining biodiversity.

Synergistic approaches in the Agricultural sectors, land management sectors including livestock and animal husbandry and pastoralists, i.e. Agro- silvo-pastoralists systems should be adopted. The interface between Research – Scientist – Policy Makers should be enhanced, where policies in the domain are based on empirical evidence and Indigenous knowledge, experiences. Neglected but highly viable sectors like Non-Timber Forest Products, artisanal fishing, small forest and land holders businesses, traditional hunting, animal husbandry, eco – cultural tourism are sectors that are the mainstay for many communities globally, providing employment, social protection systems, and incomes and generating wealth. These sectors are both victims and perpetrators of the wanton destruction of nature, land degradation through their unsustainable approaches that in turn leads to pressure on the resources, heightened competition resulting to conflicts, displacement and migration. There is an urgent need to look into these neglected sectors, invest to make them more profitable thus leading to adoption of Sustainable natural resources management.

There is a need for a strong involvement of the communities in the management of natural resources (land, forests, wildlife...), which would obviously contribute to job creation at the community level. This will help to fight against the abusive exploitation of natural resources (abusive logging, wild exploitation of mining resources, poaching...). Community awareness and nature protection should be a policy priority. The development of strategies taking into account the priorities of the Sendai Framework for Action 2015-2030 and the implementation of the envisaged actions. Use of local and endogenous knowledge for environmental protection and crisis management. In other words, man must learn to live in harmony with nature.

c) Managing Population growths

Traditional population control measures are being perceived as those that are promoted by rich nations to annihilate populations of poor countries. Without politicking this, there is no bigger risk than unregulated population growth, not even climate change. In recent years, we have witnessed unprecedented increase in urban disasters. In Mozambique, Cyclone Idai with weaker category than cyclone Kenneth created more destruction than Kenneth. This is because the Cyclone Idai hits an area with high population density unlike Kenneth. There is need to stop hiding behind the birth control methods as a mean of just promoting maternal child health while behind the scene the concept is actually to reduce population growths. We have to be transparent about this issue so that people can understand the extent of risks. Governments must frankly promote debates for home-grown solutions that regulate population growths, land use, proper planning of human settlements and ensure creation of adequate spaces for nature conservation and production of food systems.

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

² IPCC Report 2016 – Climate Change and Land

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?

- a) Coordinated implementation of Paris Agreement, Rio Conventions, Sendai Frameworks and SDGs
- b) Institutional reforms and restructuring to meet the growing demands of the post-2015 agenda
- c) Promote indigenous knowledge
- d) Ecosystem based disaster risk reduction in recent years have not only reduced risk of flooding and coastal erosion but have proven beneficial to general ecosystem health and wellbeing. This approach should be strengthened.
- e) The Great Green Wall initiative, a programme of African Union is an example of an initiative that have been pushing transformative projects and activities through the use of Nature based Solution over the past decade in the dry lands of Africa to offer sustainable solutions to the challenges of extreme weather patterns and climate change. One of the most promising action that promises to bring transformation, co –benefits and minimize risks promoted within the Great Green Wall Initiative is Agro-silvo-pastoral systems. (ASPS) The practical objective of agrosilvopastoral (ASPS) systems, in areas fundamentally devoted to cattle production, is to produce goods, traditionally forestry goods such as fuel wood, poles, and timber. These goods are used to solve immediate domestic needs, to provide for local needs and also to alleviate the pressure on natural forests.
- f) Another areas with transformative potentials is the area of Non Wood Forest Products value chains development: Non-wood forest products (NWFPs) are important sources of dietary supplement in all countries of the Sahel. The most valued forest products are gum Arabic (Acacia Senegal, Shea butter (Vitellaria paradoxa), the Nere (Parkia biglobosa), honey and others. On the economic and wealth creation level, NWFPs are used to generate significant financial returns, especially in rural areas. The NWFPs are an important source of income for women, youths and vulnerable males in a number of countries in the Sahel region with an example of gum Arabic, Tamarindus, Zizuphus, Balanites aegyptiaca, and various seeds and seeds, leaves etc.

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 tradeoffs. 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?

- a) Strengthening collaboration among Intergovernmental organization, Public Private sector partnership, national Government and CSOs for environmental management
- b) R&D policy interface should be privileged in the implementation of these activities
- c) Development of umbrella initiatives, like the Great Green Wall Initiative, CLIMDEV Africa and African Risk Capacity to promote resilience
- d) Appropriate sustainable resource mobilization and funding strategies to mobilize development funds and private investment should be developed. Providing incentives to private investors to get interested in the sustainable development and innovation.

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?

The origin of Covid19 have been attributed to animals, pangolins, bats, meaning closely linked to nature. Many reports and articles have alluded to the destruction of nature, habitat destruction, unsustainable management and exploitation of natural resources and climate change and impunity of the human society on nature. Nature Based Solutions (NBS) constitute the main solutions to mitigating the impact and providing solutions to COVID19 and curb the spread of Corona virus. The lockdown implemented by many countries disproportionately affects the poor and even more so those depending on natural resources, agriculture, livestock for subsistence and income generation and agriculture. For economic and social recovery to be effective, Nature and NBS and Ecological services will play key roles especially when the source of the virus is from nature. In Africa, many of the vulnerable populations are depending on natural therapies as treatment and cure for covid19. Appropriate food and nutrition is required for a resilient human systems, so NBS is key. Land restoration, Sustainable management of natural resources, our forests, curbing illegal trade in wildlife and wild fauna are all areas that have to be tackle.

It is clear that, financing will be redirected from sectors like Environment to health in order to combat the pandemic, but this will be 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'. There is a need to rather intensify investment in the Natural Resources and Sustainable land management sector if sustainable solutions are going to be found in both rebuilding our economies and combating covid19 and spread of corona virus.

COVID-19 has imposed itself as a crisis. In a crisis situation everyone wants to do something to serve humanity – for good reason. Usually this comes with emotions. This has led to two major challenges – poor coordination of the response and abandoning other priorities. All African Countries have shifted their focus to COVID-19 response yet leaving ongoing disasters which are left more lives than COVID-19 unattended. In Rwanda, a flood killed 65 people on 7 May 2020 yet fortunately COVID-19 which has been given all the attention it deserves has not yet claimed any life - We pray it won't, thank to Rwanda for proactive response to the Pandemic. In Eastern Africa locust invasion will likely result to acute food shortages if not famine as ongoing restrictions have put constraints on the fight against the desert locust.

There is an urgent need to develop programmes that will resuscitate the economy and promote job creation and social safety programmes to build resilience of the most vulnerable. On the immediate need, the disaster risk management agencies should bolster non-public health response to COVID-19 and strengthen coordination for effective response.