

28 May 2021

Business and Industry Group Major Group - HLPF 2021 // Sectoral Paper

The Business and Industry Major Group has noted the findings of the UN Secretary-General's recent report, "Progress Towards the SDGs." In particular, we welcome the clarity this important report has provided on efforts by governments and other stakeholders to make progress toward the global goals in spite of the tragic disruptions of the pandemic. As the SG has pointed out, the impacts on people, societies, economies, and planet are diverse and ongoing, and we are troubled by the report's findings that progress towards the SDGs has been delayed, and worse yet, that hard won progress in key development areas has lost ground in many parts of the world.

In our view, this gives particular urgency to this year's HLPF – it should provide the "much needed wake-up call" described in the SG's report. The international community has to get back on track, with:

- special attention to those areas where indicators have reflected setbacks in efforts to leave no-one behind, and
- a dedication to inclusive multilateralism that engages every societal partner working side by side with governments, and with one another.

The private sector has been at the forefront of tackling the pandemic – from the historic race to develop vaccines, to opening premises to production of PPE and vaccination campaigns, to training and educating employees on public health and safety. It is in everyone's interest that that health services and vaccines are equally accessible for all. In addition, the pandemic has put into stark relief the pressing need for countries to addressing informality and sustainable social protection systems, and to enhance their planning and emergency response preparedness.

Private enterprises, especially MSMEs and SMEs, have been hit hard by the pandemic, aggravating growing poverty and vulnerability – according to the ILO, in 2020 8.8 percent global working hours were lost, an equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs with a disproportionate impact on women and youth. The IMF estimates that 100 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty because of the pandemic.

The review of SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth during this year's HLPF will be more crucial than ever to inform roadmaps for a job-rich recovery and get the international community back on track for collective action to achieve the SDGs.

In our view, SDG action and building back stronger together must go hand in hand. The integrated sustainability approach reflected in the SDGs should guide infrastructure investment, business-to-business capacity building and restoring access to education.

Recovering sustainably in the Decade of Action and Delivery will require a stronger than ever commitment to multi-stakeholder engagement and partnership in inclusive intergovernmental deliberations. Part of that is the science-policy-business and society interface, which is vital to

cooperation on R&D, tracking of progress and impact, and the development and deployment of innovation. In particular, the private sector must be a meaningful partner in building back better – contributing not just funding, but innovation, expertise, technology, fresh ideas, and diverse perspectives of business and employers, particularly SMEs, who are so crucial to economic growth at the local level.

We urge Member States and the UN Development System to substantively engage diverse stakeholders, including representative business groups and employer federations, into the formulation of UN Cooperation Frameworks, UN Common Country Analyses, as well in the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Doing so would ensure that programming more effectively reflects the reality on the ground and leverages the valuable perspectives and contributions of the private sector, including SMEs, to tackle the most pressing issues.

We recommend that the 2021 High Level Forum prioritize and support:

- a. Cross-sectoral partnership and cooperation with business, including at the national level (through Resident Coordinators) and regional levels, not only in relation to investment and finance, but across the entire gamut of the SDGs.
- b. New ways of conducting meetings that truly enhance substantive engagement of business and other stakeholders, and that recognizes the distinct role of business.
- c. New and concrete engagement mechanisms, institutional infrastructure and opportunities for the UN system, governments, businesses and other stakeholders to come together on achieving the SDGs.

We look forward to engaging with Member States, the UN system, and all other stakeholders at the 2021 HLPF at this critical time. While there are challenges ahead and uncertainty is real, there are opportunities in the coming year to advance solutions through inclusive multilateralism – including at this year’s UNGA High-level Dialogue on Energy, climate and biodiversity COP’s, the Food Security Summit, reform in the WTO and UNEA 5.2. Hope is on the horizon, but realizing it will require bold and collective action, and institutional innovation, building on the recommendations of the UN75 report. We stand ready to do our part.