

Statement – Ligia Noronha, UN ASG and Head of UNEP New York Office <<check against delivery>>

Event

“Building back better towards inclusive, sustainable, and just economies for recovery:

Re-designing the contract between people and planet”

ECOSOC Integration Dialogue II

Thursday, 3 June 2021, 09:00 a.m. EDT

- **Crises we currently face.** More than a year from the onset of the pandemic, the social and economic costs of COVID-19 continue to mount and reverberate across the globe. With both the pandemic and the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, no one is safe unless everyone is safe.
- **Green transition.** We can tackle the pandemic and achieve a green transition - some of the most economically effective stimulus policies are the very same policies that will lead us towards deep decarbonization and improvements in pollution and nature loss and help us address the global and domestic inequalities that only grew in 2020.
- **Recovery spending falling short.** But global green recovery spending has been incommensurate with the scale of the planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss, and pollution. According to continuing analysis by UNEP and the University of Oxford, in 2020 only 19.0% of recovery spending was green. ([GRO](#)).
- The experience of the pandemic and governments actions will likely also see increased demands from civil society for more **transparency and accountability around government spending and planning**. We are already seeing a snowball effect with movements like Fridays for Future, and as we get more evidence on the key **link between ecosystem collapse, climate change, pollution and public health**, citizens will mobilize for change.
- **Good practices on recovery packages.** Embedding environmental considerations in recovery packages will not just be good for the environment - it makes economic sense and will create a foundation for a strong, job-rich economy.
 - **Investing in nature conservation** has multipliers of up to 7x over five years. Spending to support unsustainable land uses has negative returns. ([IME](#))
 - **Spending on clean energy** has an impact on GDP that is about 2x – 7x stronger—than spending on non-eco-friendly energy. ([IME](#))
 - **Investments in renewable energies, building efficiency and green transport** would add 20.5 million jobs by 2030, compared to 3 million jobs under BAU (ILO)

- **Greening the public finance frameworks** to ensure an integration of environment across fiscal policy and regulation design will be crucial to aligning national policymaking and growth trajectories with Agenda 2030, Paris Agreement and post-2020 biodiversity targets.
- **UNEP support on building-back better.** UNEP, through its work with IMF, UNDP, GIZ, the University of Oxford and others in the Green Fiscal Policy Network and other partnerships will continue to support Member States in finding and implementing solutions which help resource green recoveries and build-back better.

Action-oriented solutions to address climate change, as well as interlinked sustainable development goals in our path towards more resilient and sustainable societies.

- It is estimated that applying **circular economy strategies** in just five key areas (cement, aluminium, steel, plastics, and food) can eliminate almost half of the emissions from the production of goods – 9.3 billion tonnes of CO₂e in 2050 – equivalent to cutting current emissions from all transport to zero¹.
- A circular economy approach is also a highly effective at **creating new jobs**. Research in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC region) indicates that adopting a circular economy approach could create a net total of 4.8 million new jobs in the region with businesses engaged in practices for reuse, repair, remanufacturing of products and parts, and recycling². A circular economy in Africa could also have positive employment effects, with the potential of creating 11 million new jobs by 2030³. Ensuring that green jobs in the circular economy are decent and do not compromise workers' safety, especially in low-skilled sectors, should therefore be a priority of governments⁴.
- Global **food loss and waste** generate annually about 8% of total anthropogenic GHG emissions, almost equivalent to global road transport emissions⁵. Agricultural and food waste must be reduced, and that which is unavoidable needs to be treated to extract nutrients and biogas, rather than be allowed to degrade in landfills, where it is a significant source of methane. Designing out waste along the whole value chain can also serve to sequester carbon in the soil through regenerative agricultural practices and avoid emissions related to uneaten food and unused by-products⁶.
- In the **transport sector**, a shared and circular mobility system could reduce the cost of travel by as much as 70%⁷. In addition, material efficiency strategies could reduce greenhouse gas emissions

¹Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2019), [Completing the Picture: How the Circular Economy Tackles Climate Change](#)

² ECLAC/ILO. (2018) [Environmental sustainability and employment in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean No.19. Santiago: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/International Labour Organization.

³ Rademaekers, K, Smit, T.A.B, Artola, I., Koehler, J., Hemkhaus, M., Ahlers, J., Van Hummelen, S., Chewpreecha, U., Smith, A., & McGovern, M. (2021). Circular economy in the Africa-EU cooperation – Continental report. Continental report under EC Contract ENV.F.2./ETU/2018/004 Project: "Circular Economy in Africa-Eu cooperation", Trinomics B.V., Tomorrow Matters Now Ltd., adelphi Consult GmbH and Cambridge Econometrics Ltd. [Website]. Publications Office of the European Union. <http://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4faa23f2-8b8a-11eb-b85c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁴ IISD & SITRA. (2020). Effects of the Circular Economy on Jobs (p. 17). International Institute for Sustainable Development. <https://www.iisd.org/system/files/2020-12/circular-economy-jobs.pdf>

⁵ FAO, [Food wastage footprint & Climate Change](#).

⁶ Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2019), [Cities and Circular Economy for Food](#).

⁷ Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2019), [Completing the Picture: How the Circular Economy Tackles Climate Change](#)

from the material cycle of passenger cars (i.e., at production, use and disposal stages) in 2050 by up to 70% in G7 countries and 50 to 60% in China and India.

- **Digital information and communication technologies** (ICT) can enable up to a 20 percent reduction of global CO₂ emissions by 2030 when applied to five sectors: mobility, manufacturing, agriculture, energy, and buildings. Smart use of green ICT solutions can help cut multiple times more CO₂e than they emit.⁸ Digital technologies such as tracking, tracking and design can help reduce the natural resources and other materials used in products by 90% - through efficiency and by turning products into services in a circular economy.⁹ This can help reduce the impact of material extraction on nature and the environment, and it can reduce pollution and industrial emissions as well as support consumers choice for more sustainable products.
- UNEP is one of the co-champions of the Coalition for Digital Environmental Sustainability (CODES) that is now working with a group of change makers from the public and private sectors to accelerate an inclusive and equitable digital planet for sustainability. We are currently co-drafting a flagship report on the digital transformation and environmental sustainability nexus – followed by a concrete action plan for greening our digital future. This is being done as part of the UN Secretary General’s Digital Cooperation Roadmap.
- Considering that about 50% of the urban environment needed by 2050 is not yet built¹⁰, different **building techniques**, including embedding carbon through the use of wood, and a more circular cement, steel and aluminium production and use will have a large potential for mitigation with upgraded construction materials and techniques¹¹.

Closing remarks

- While we call for a green recovery to build a foundation for a sustainably prosperous future, the Economic and Social Council, including through the Integration segment and the HLPF, still plays a significant role in bringing together a multistakeholder partnership to find solutions to our compounded crises and ensure that no country is left facing a choice between saving lives and the environment, on one hand, and stifling austerity, on the other.
- Thank you.

⁸ https://www.ctc-n.org/sites/d8uat.ctc-n.org/files/resources/full_report2.pdf

⁹ James Arbib and Tony Seba. 2020. Rethinking humanity.

¹⁰ IRP (2018), [The Weight of Cities: Resource Requirements of Future Urbanization](#).

¹¹ IRP (2020), [Resource Efficiency and Climate Change: Material Efficiency Strategies for a Low-Carbon Future](#).