



ECOSOC INTEGRATION SEGMENT

**Accelerated action and transformative pathways:
Realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development**

Shared Responsibility to Recover Better from COVID-19

6 July 2020, WebEx Virtual Meeting

ECOSOC VICE-PRESIDENT'S SUMMARY

The Integration Segment, chaired by the ECOSOC Vice-President and Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Mher Margaryan, took place the day before HLPF on 6 July. The Segment discussed analysis and policy proposals emanating from ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and the UN system on the 2020 theme of ECOSOC and HLPF “*Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*”. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the theme was explored with a focus on overcoming the human crisis and recovering better.

In his welcoming remarks, the Vice-President of ECOSOC H.E. Ambassador Mher Margaryan called for immediate collective action to respond to the devastating socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. He noted the importance of exploring ways to unleash the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda through the six entry points identified in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report. Following the Vice-President’s opening remarks, the United Nations Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. António Guterres, delivered a keynote address via video message. The Secretary-General expressed his determination that the United Nations system would be at the centre of a coherent, people-focused recovery that is shaped by human rights. The Secretary-General reiterated his call for everyone to accelerate coordinated global action to ensure that the world recovers better from the crisis and delivers on the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

During the Integration Segment, Ms. Simona Petrova, Secretary of CEB, introduced the annual overview report of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). The 2019 CEB agenda focused on multiple forward-looking initiatives that play a vital role in supporting a post pandemic recovery. The CEB focused on inter-connected frontier issues that could provide the UN system future-proof analysis for proactively tackling complex, fast evolving and unpredictable challenges. The High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) Inequalities Task Team set up in 2019, co-led by UN-WOMEN and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, has leveraged the Secretary-General’s recent call to action for human rights and focused on the priorities, needs and perspectives of the diverse global community to inform an effective and durable multilateral response. Additionally, a roadmap for innovating UN data and statistics to aid evidence-based policy-making was adopted at the CEB spring 2020 session. At CEB’s latest session in May 2020, the Secretary-General called on all CEB members to support countries with policy advice to ensure policy coherence for an employment-led and people-centered recovery – all within the SDG promise. As CEB Chair, he further highlighted the benefits of inclusive multilateralism, drawing on the indispensable contributions of civil society, business, academia, cities, regions and, in particular, giving greater weight to the voices of youth.

Several chairs of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, as well as leaders of specialized agencies and representatives of the United Nations system participated as panelists during the interactive

discussions, and Chairs of Groups of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), the Like-Minded Group of Countries Supporters of Middle-Income Countries and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) participated as lead discussants. The interactive discussions focused on the topics of “*Getting back on track for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*” and “*Leaving no one behind in the context of COVID-19 and the decade of action and delivery*”. The ECOSOC Integration Segment demonstrated a powerful, forward-looking and unified commitment to the achievement of the SDGs and the importance of the 2030 Agenda, especially in the context of COVID-19 and its socio-economic effects. The panelists and lead discussants agreed on the unprecedented multidimensional effects of the pandemic and the potential setbacks on the hard-won development gains achieved over the last few decades. They noted that the pandemic compounded pre-existing obstacles to the realization of the SDGs. Many participants rallied behind the calls made in the Secretary-General’s policy brief on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 for recovering better.

Participants viewed the COVID-19 pandemic response as an opportunity to advance global solidarity and multilateralism. A renewed and strengthened commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs was critical to address the multidimensional impacts of the pandemic. Nationally-fragmented responses may lead to global inefficiencies and policy failures, exacerbating inequalities among and within countries. The social and economic impacts of COVID-19 have been particularly pronounced in countries with weaker health systems, less fiscal space to organize stimulus packages, higher levels of debt, more limited access to international financing, weak productive capacity and low incomes.

The multilateral response for health, socio-economic and humanitarian crises must be coordinated, guided by a spirit of solidarity and put countries back on track for achieving the SDGs. The fiscal and financial conditions need to be set-up for resetting of economies driven by new sources of productivity, including green and digital engines of growth. Countries must promote sustainable jobs of the future – health and care services, digital technologies, green infrastructure, including through labor market policies and incentives to small businesses. Enhancing productive capacity, diversifying the productive base and creating a level playing field through a rules-based multilateral system would contribute to transformational change.

Despite pockets of achievement for the SDGs prior to the pandemic, progress was already uneven and insufficient. Participants highlighted some of the challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included the reversal of progress with regard to food security and reducing hunger, the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence, the increasing prevalence of climate change and its interlinkages with other SDGs. The pandemic put a spotlight on the poor and most vulnerable, including women, older people, young people, children, low-wage earners, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, refugees and migrants. Vulnerable groups need to be prioritized and focused on, not only on a national or regional level, but also regarding their inclusion in the decision-making processes.

Participants emphasized the need to enhance social protection and access to essential services for the poorest and most vulnerable to ensure no one was left behind. Overlapping inequalities will not be overcome without policies and targeted measures that acknowledge and address their systemic nature. Social protection measures must remain in place beyond lockdowns and be extended to protect households’ income and target the more vulnerable groups. In relation to trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, reinstating the basic principles for equal access to services, including healthcare, and protection without discrimination was essential during the crisis. Recovering better should also entail strengthening occupational safety and health, adapting work arrangements, preventing discrimination, stigma and exclusion, providing access to health and paid leave and enforcement of international labour standards.

Integrated policy responses will be key to addressing governance, social protection, informality, unpaid care work, labor rights protection, access to justice, homelessness, access to affordable housing, universal health coverage and risks related to new technologies. Social dialogue, bringing together governments with employers and workers, could facilitate effective and balanced policy responses. Building the resilience of social sectors, including health systems, water and sanitation and education, must be a priority. Collective action needs to address the negative impact of the pandemic on all spheres of life. Women's and girls' needs, voices and leadership must be at the heart of the investment for recovery.

The risks of reversing development gains in particular in LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and middle-income countries and pushing people further behind were raised. In view of the complexities middle-income countries faced, there was a need to rethink the traditional homogenous designation of "middle-income countries". Countries in special situations required a tailored support and consideration. The limited pool of development finance currently at their disposal was being repurposed or diverted to respond to the immediate needs arising from the COVID-19 crisis. International financial institutions, therefore, were called on to scale up their efforts to provide targeted and accessible financing to ensure developing countries have the fiscal space for effective response. Furthermore, humanitarian assistance and international support, especially for social protection, were considered critical to millions of people in developing countries. The Committee for Development Policy will be undertaking a comprehensive study on the impact of COVID-19 on LDCs and take the impacts into account when assessing candidates for graduation. An analysis report on the impact of COVID-19 on middle-income countries, with policy recommendations for the UN system, was requested.

It was suggested that the immediate multilateral response should also include the capitalization of all multilateral development banks; an issuance of the IMF's Special Drawing Rights by at least \$500 billion, and for the advanced economies to put their shares into trust funds to finance programmes in emerging markets and developing countries. Greater debt relief for low income countries and mechanisms to facilitate debt restructuring for other developing countries that may need it as well as a coordinated use of regulations on international capital flows were also needed.

Special focus was drawn to Africa, where progress was being threatened by the pandemic. Many countries in Africa were facing a liquidity crisis, which needed to be addressed urgently to sustain economies. Another priority for Africa was to ensure access to affordable supplies for an effective health response. Building back in Africa needed to happen in a more sustainable way, for example through circular economy, with sustainable financing. In this regard, access to technology for young people would be particularly important, as well promoting trade.

Some countries have taken steps for building back better and transformative change for a more resilient world. Countries were using the crisis as an opportunity to reverse course and accelerate a sustainable growth trajectory. In one country, support for small farmers were considered essential to guarantee the sustainability of the food supply chain to preserve food security and the level of nutrition. Efforts also focused on protecting the business sector, in particular small-sized businesses. The European Union's Green Deal, and the climate ambitions of over 100 countries through their National Determined Contributions (NDCs), supported by UNDP's Climate Promise were highlighted. In some cases, the NDCs were used to improve access to healthcare, energy, and digitization, and spark a "capabilities revolution" for young people.

Integrated policies and incentives will be key to accelerating the transition to economies that protect biodiversity and that are low-carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive. The need to restore forests, stop deforestation and invest in how countries manage our land and protected areas was highlighted. Investments in resilient, sustainable and inclusive food systems must go

beyond production and address the entire food supply chain, along with promotion of sustainable practices and diets. Countries need to be able to identify emerging food insecurity hotspots, map national and international food supply chains, and address vulnerabilities and impediments.

Governments should prevent systemic risks, including those presented by climate change, by drastically reducing emissions and improving resilience. This means adopting 100% clean-energy system; harnessing the potential of natural climate solutions; building climate-resilient infrastructure; and putting in place a comprehensive crises mitigation and resilience building mechanism that could be triggered against any shock and hazard.

Recovering better for the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development requires a coherent whole-of-government approach and meaningful engagement of all relevant stakeholders. Financing in all its forms remains critical for transformations to get back on track for the SDGs. The gaps in data, information and analysis must be addressed for informed and evidence-based policy-making.

The cost of inaction will continue to increase exponentially with the most vulnerable paying the price. Attempting to relaunch the economy without placing inequality and climate change front and center will push people even further behind and fail at ensuring resilience to future crises. The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportune moment to launch transformative pathways with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, as well as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the SAMOA Pathway as guiding frameworks. Transformational change can be achieved through a systemic approach, in particular focusing on food systems or energy systems. Building on the many interlinkages among the SDGs can help end poverty in all its forms and dimensions and rebuild inclusive societies that are resilient in the face of future pandemics, climate-related events and other challenges. Concrete actions need to be taken by stakeholders to bring about necessary systemic changes.

The role of the United Nations Development System in supporting national efforts to achieve the SDGs and in line with national priorities was underscored. In this regard, flexibility, as opposed to a one size fits all approach - as part of the system-wide response – would be important in assisting developing countries to respond and build resilience. Support for more coordinated efforts with resident coordinators and regional commissions would be important as they are the frontlines of the response.

The importance of ECOSOC and its pivotal role in the coordination and facilitation of the various subsidiary bodies, agencies, and other UN system bodies were mentioned on multiple occasions. ECOSOC needed to lead a coherent, people-centered, gender-sensitive and transformative approach focused around recovery and building back better in an inclusive and sustainable way. To fulfill this vital role and to overcome policy silos, further communication and harmonization is needed to improve the role of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies in providing policy recommendations in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

The Economic and Social Council will continue to provide an inclusive platform to explore integrated policies that can respond to the world's most urgent challenges, amplifying the rich and relevant work of the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and the UN system for the 2030 Agenda and for recovering better.