



## 2020 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

#### Key messages and recommendations from ECOSOC Subsidiary Bodies

The present document provides highlights from the voluntary submissions prepared by the functional commissions and expert bodies of the Economic and Social Council. Contributions were provided in response to an invitation by the President of the Council, dated 26 January 2020 and 5 February 2020, requesting the respective Chairs to offer substantive inputs to the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF), highlighting their contributions towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The complete texts of the submissions received are available on the ECOSOC website<sup>1</sup>.

#### Response to COVID-19 pandemic

- The current COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the economy, employment as well as social systems poses an unprecedented global challenge. There is concern that this in turn will lead to setbacks in the implementation of the Agenda 2030.
- The importance of the ability of the public sector to deal with crises has been highlighted in the case of the COVID -19 pandemic. Some Governments have shown a greater readiness to deal with the crisis than others, including through well-functioning health systems that leave no one behind, and an ability to rally different branches and institutions within the public sector, to activate virtual learning and teaching support while addressing persistent digital divides. The COVID -19 pandemic may set back the attainment of the SDGs in some countries, but it could also point to the ability of Governments to take extraordinary steps to attain the SDGs.
- The gravity of the present moment should not obscure the fact that many of the factors that are worsening the effects of the pandemic were already present in the global and regional context, and at the national level as well. For that reason, the response to the health crisis should be accompanied by reflection, followed by appropriate action, to avoid perpetuating unsustainable courses of action such as those pursued until now.
- Nationally and internationally, action to address both the COVID-19 health crisis and its social and economic implications must respect the pledge to leave no one behind and safeguard human rights, particularly for women and girls. Women compose the vast majority of health and care workers, paid or unpaid; are subject to domestic violence that has been reported to have increased over periods of lockdown, and are overrepresented in informal, more vulnerable and low-paying jobs. Response to the crisis needs to include women in decision-making.
- A renewed and strengthened multilateralism – in finance, trade, climate, migration and knowledge governance is needed to address the immediate health crisis, stem the economic impacts and accelerate SDG implementation.
- Now more than ever, a strong rules-based multilateralism is critical, including a commitment to maintain open and free trade; a commitment to keep open borders, with restrictions only for clear health reasons; a commitment to freely share knowledge of vaccines, treatments, tests and help all developing countries

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/node/25553375>

to get access to them; and a commitment to help the poorest countries, particularly LDCs, weather the economic shock they are facing. ECOSOC should promote an inclusive process of reform of multilateral rules and institutions to ensure they support equitable and green development.

## Gaps and Challenges

- Many Government institutions are not able to implement the SDGs at the desired scale and speed because of a general undervaluing of the public sector in economic theories of the past decades, which has resulted in smaller but less effective public administration and a disregard of the public value that it may create.
- Silo-thinking continues to hamper the holistic implementation of the SDGs and hinder action to ensure that no one is left behind. A strong political commitment will be needed to connect the political and administrative silos within international policy action, development aid, and peacebuilding, as well as for the reinforcement of existing multilateral and regional political and economic mechanisms.
- Corruption and lack of access to independent and efficient judicial justice have a major negative impact on economic growth, as both are essential for the prevalence of the rule of law. Corruption does not only undermine democratic institutions, but also slows economic development and contributes to governmental instability.
- Progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls has not been fast or deep enough and in some areas, has been uneven. Obstacles persist and major gaps remain. Implementation gaps have been identified in all 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. Poverty, global economic inequality and the lack of equitable distribution of development gains within and among countries are recognized as fundamental challenges to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
- No country has fully achieved gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and many women and girls experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, vulnerability and marginalization throughout their life course.
- The gender divide in STEM, ICT and computing remains a key issue. Women are a minority among graduates in computer science and are underrepresented among STI decision-makers and in the digital sector. On average, women are 17 per cent less likely than men to use the Internet. The gap ranges from 3 per cent in developed countries to 43 per cent in the least developed countries.
- While access to ICTs has continued to grow, there remain large discrepancies between regions and countries in terms of technological capabilities research and development (R&D) expenditures, number of researchers and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates. This significant divide can both perpetuate existing inequalities and create new disparities; mainly affecting the least developed countries. Although official development assistance (ODA) is an important source of technical and financial support to developing countries to close gaps in technological capabilities, ODA targeting STI capacities has not increased over the past decade.
- There is a lack of recognition of demographic change as a transformative trend with broad implications for sustainable development and only marginal recognition of the needs and contribution of older persons within the 2030 Agenda.
- Despite the crucial contribution of forests and sustainable forest management to sustainable development, deforestation and forest degradation continue in many regions, often in response to the demand for wood, food, fuel and fibre, threatening the progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. With the world's population projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050 and 10.9 billion in 2100, the global demand for and consumption of forest products and services is projected to accelerate and put further pressure on forests.
- Currently, over 7 million hectares of natural forests continue to be converted annually to other land uses owing chiefly to large-scale commercial agriculture. While the rate of deforestation has slowed down in

many regions over the past decade, estimates indicate that tree cover loss has steadily been rising in the tropics since 2000 due to human and natural causes, including fires and storms, posing imminent challenges that require urgent cross-sectoral action at all levels to sustainably manage forests, including through their conservation, restoration and expansion.

- The lack of quality, timely and disaggregated data to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind, resources and insufficient statistical capacity are critical gaps in implementing the 2030 Agenda.
- There are still a number of gaps and challenges in the SDG/sustainability reporting agenda, including the existence of multiple frameworks and guidance; the lack of consistency in measurement methodologies which leads to a lack of comparability and reduced usefulness to track progress; lack of transparency; lack of technical human capacity, lack of practical tools and metrics.

### Priority areas for action

- Synergies across the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 should be maximized, including through developing national and local disaster risk reduction strategies in accordance with the Sendai Framework and promote their alignment and integration with sustainable development and climate change adaptation strategies.
- The relationship among achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the relevant major United Nations conferences and summits and their outcomes and follow-up are mutually reinforcing. Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.
- Governments can break the vicious circle between disaster, poverty and inequality by (i) investing in building resilience including through robust social protection schemes; (ii) capitalizing on technological innovations in the reduction of, response to and recovery from disasters; and (iii) building on regional actions and systems to address the transboundary nature of disasters.
- In order to end hunger and poverty in all its forms everywhere, national governments should ensure policy coherence across ministries and integrate strategies that deal with forests, agriculture, food, land use, and rural and national development while promoting sustainable consumption and production in close partnership with the private sector, industries and the civil society, among other stakeholders.
- There is a need to continue to promote more inclusive, equitable, balanced, stable and people-centered sustainable growth to simultaneously reduce poverty and inequality in all its dimensions, including gender inequality. In particular, implementing comprehensive social policies and programmes, including job creation programmes and universal age-, disability- and gender-sensitive social protection systems, to close the inequality gap would be key. Social protection policies and measures with poverty reduction programmes and other social policies need to be coordinated.
- Labour market policies that strengthen institutions and provide adequate labour protection to all workers, especially the most disadvantaged, including through minimum wage policies as part of policies to boost income growth for the majority of workers need to be adopted. Policies to support the full and productive participation of women, including women with disabilities, in the labour market, and to close the gender pay gap should be implemented. Such policies include access to childcare facilities, support to balance family and professional life, promote the sharing of responsibilities between parents, and meaningful participation by women in the economy and in decision-making processes at all levels.
- Social expenditures are a condition of sustainable economic growth, and investment, rather than a burden on the economy. It is important to remind Member States that progressive realisation of rights should not be interpreted as suggesting that realisation of economic, social and cultural rights should follow wealth

creation, but rather as a condition for prosperity. An inclusive social protection floor is important to achieve the SDGs in the context of fast ageing population in many developing countries where social protection systems remain fragmented and under invested.

- At subnational levels, leaving no one behind can be accelerated through decentralization, local development and strengthening of local government finance and financial management. A coherent whole-of-government approach and the collaborative engagement of all relevant institutions and stakeholders throughout the policy cycle are crucial. There is a need to empower local governments and community groups to deliver the SDGs in an integrated fashion. Effective decentralization, including for taxation and expenditures, ensures that local governments have the appropriate responsibility, authority and capacity to take action.
- The promotion of peaceful, corruption-free and inclusive societies for sustainable development, with a focus on a people-centred approach that provides access to justice for all and builds effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels is essential. It is crucial to engage all members of society in crime prevention, placing particular emphasis on communities, families, children and youth in order to effectively address the conditions in which crime and violence can emerge. There is a need to foster partnerships with the private sector and to engage with civil society in crime prevention as well as in developing programmes to assist victims of crime and reduce recidivism.
- There is a need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to crime prevention and criminal justice reform, based on baseline assessments, regular data collection and analysis. Member States must strengthen their national statistical systems of criminal justice.
- In order to reap the benefits of rapid technological change, countries should promote the use, adaptation and development of frontier technologies for inclusive and sustainable development, including through capacity building and matching skill supply and demand. Governments are encouraged to promote retraining, life-long learning and employment support mechanisms to address the risk of technological unemployment. Strengthened support for closing digital divides in access and skills through appropriate ICT infrastructure and improving users' capabilities, especially among vulnerable groups, youths, and women and girls would be critical. The voice, participation and leadership of women and girls as consumers and producers of science and technology should be strengthened.
- The traditional and new ICTs in the development of policies and programmes can help strengthen crime prevention and criminal justice, including for identifying public safety issues, and fostering public participation. It is important to promote the use of new technologies to facilitate cooperation and partnerships between the police and the communities they serve, as well as of sharing good practices and exchange information on community policing. While modern ICTs offer innovative tools in addressing crime, they also create additional threats, including cybercrime.
- Forests regulate the provision of water and water-related ecosystem services within a larger climate-forest-water-people system, offering sustainable solutions to address pressure from increasing and changing demands from growing population and economic development.
- The capacity of national statistical systems needs to be strengthened, especially in the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS and other countries in vulnerable situations, to meet the data demands for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for monitoring and reporting on the SDGs and targets.
- There is an urgent need to strengthen the capacities of Governments in SDG reporting, including to measure and monitor the private sector's contribution to the 2030 Agenda. The comparability and consistency of the SDG reporting by companies to enable data availability for investors and governments must be facilitated. In addition, integrated reporting should also be facilitated.
- There is a need for a better coordination of the UN statistical system in order to strengthen the voice of the statistical community in the dialogue with policy makers and reduce the data reporting burden and eliminate data discrepancies across the UN system.

- Public-private sector partnership is critical to ensure relevance and acceptance of measures towards harmonization and comparability of the SDG reporting by companies and recognition of mutual benefits of useful SDG reporting to all key stakeholders.
- ISAR developed the Guidance on Core Indicators for Entity Reporting on Contribution towards Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as a toolkit for organizations to provide comparable baseline data on their contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and as a means to facilitate the comparability of companies' reporting on sustainability issues in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also helps countries in preparing their voluntary national reports for the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.
- The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) revised the global SDG indicator framework, significantly improving the overall quality of the indicator framework without adding burden to countries. The revised indicator framework was adopted by the Statistical Commission and will support the global monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. The IAEG-SDGs will develop guidelines and build capacity to improve data disaggregation to measure the poor and people in vulnerable situations.